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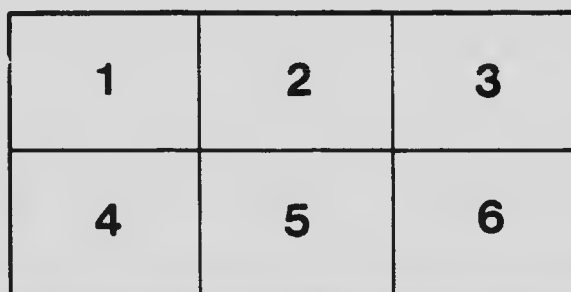
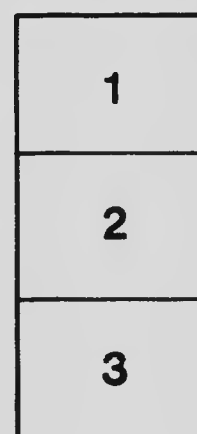
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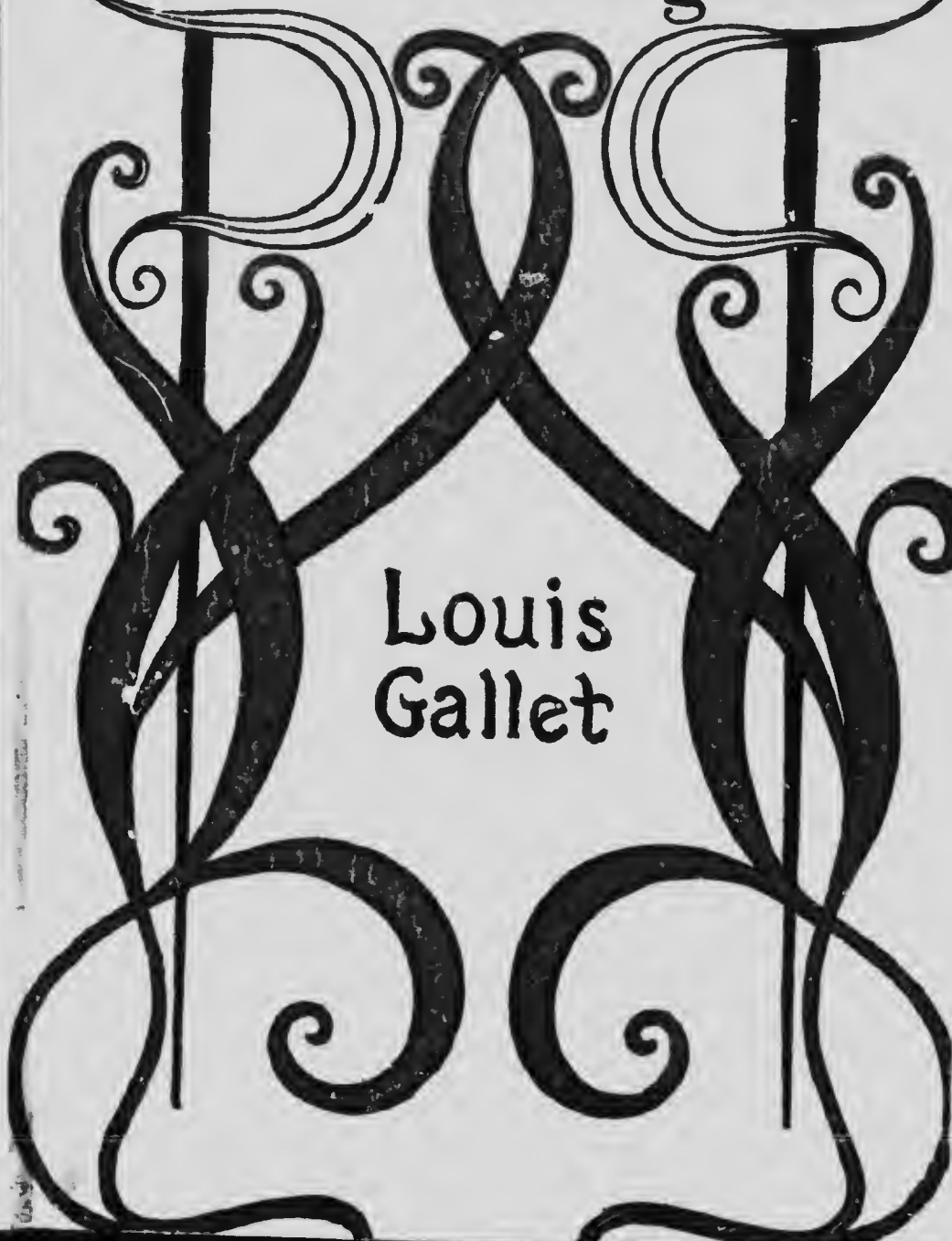
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The Adventures of  
Cyrano de Bergerac



Louis  
Gallet



THE ADVENTURES OF  
CYRANO DE BERGERAC



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THE ADVENTURES OF  
Cyrano de Bergerac

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF LOUIS GALLET

BY  
HETTIE E. MILLER



THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY  
TORONTO, CANADA

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Captain Satan, or, The Adventures of Cyrano de  
Bergerac.

I.

TOWARD the end of October, 1651 A. D., a horseman, at dusk passed through the gates of Château Fougerolles, and took the road leading to the Dordogne.

He encountered a brisk wind, which lashed his face; this the cavalier heeded little, but sat upon his steed as erect as a paladin in a coat of mail.

At that hour, on that sequestered road, he might have been taken for one of those pirates, who live on the purses of others.

However, he had no thought of concealing himself, nor of wrongdoing.

After a ride of an hour the horseman left the road for a narrow path, which lay between two hills, and which was overgrown with heather and broom. The old trees, which skirted it, were so close together, that he had difficulty in making his way through the boughs; he walked his horse, made a passage, with the handle of his whip, through the branches which met above his

head, and awaking the echoes, he sang in a clear, strong voice a ballad then in vogue :

“ Que c'est une richesse extrême  
 D'être sain en la pauvreté !  
 Mais c'est bien la pauvreté même  
 De n'avoir argenti ni santé.  
 Un petit grenier est mon Louvre,  
 Mon manteau, jour et nuit, me couvre.  
 Ou me donne un drap en trois mois ;  
 Pour tous rideaux j'ai la muraille  
 Avec une botte de paille  
 Dessus un motelas de bois.”

When the singer emerged from the narrow ravine, he found that he was near the river-bank, on the towing-path, leading directly to the ferry, on the other side of which was Saint-Sernin.

The moon had risen above Gardannes.

The traveler by its light could distinguish, several paces from him, the figure of a man, standing motionless, in his hands the glistening barrel of a musket.

The horseman, to all appearances not in the least disconcerted by the suspicious apparition, continued on his way with unconcern ; on reaching the spot, however, where the stranger was posted, the latter stepped forward, and barring the way, whined :

“ Alms, if you please, sir, alms, a poor man begs humbly for alms.”

“ Ah, sir,” replied the knight in a mocking voice, “ it seems to me that you are somewhat too well-armed for a genuine beggar,” and he struck the barrel of the gun with the end of his whip, as he spoke.

“ The roads are so unsafe, dear sir,” returned the other in an apologetic tone.

“ Ha, I should think you had nothing to lose.”

“On the contrary!”

And half-derisively, half in menace the beggar repeated: “Alms, dear sir.”

“The devil, that sounds just like: Your money or your life!”

“As you like, sir, I am satisfied.”

With a quick movement he placed the musket against the horseman’s breast.

“Ah, you have fine arguments,” scoffed the latter, “but, wait.”

He flung aside the weapon, leaped from his saddle, and seized the bandit by his throat.

When he felt that the malefactor was half-strangled by his powerful pressure, that the musket had fallen from his hand, he grasped both of his wrists and bestowed upon him a severe, although well-merited flogging with his whip.

The man begged for mercy and fell on his knees.

“I might break your head, were I ill-disposed, or I might take you to Fougerolles if I had time to do so. Still, this time I will let you go. You may thank the devil, your patron!—However, look at me closely, knave, that you may take to your heels in good season when you next see me. I have given you excellent advice.”

The kneeling bandit slowly raised to his vanquisher’s face his black eyes which sparkled with hatred, as, by the pale light of the moon he examined the nobleman’s mocking features, while the latter sought to impress upon his memory the rogue’s face, at once pitiful and angry.

“I shall recognize you, sir,” murmured the man in a strange tone. “Let me go my way.”

Whilst the false beggar slowly rose and rubbed his sides, the knight seized the barrel of the musket, swung it above his head in a circle several times, and then flung it into the Dordogne.

Thereupon he mounted his steed and galloped away, leaving his assailant utterly confounded by the unexpected termination of the adventure. Arrived at the ferry, he summoned the ferryman, and ten minutes later was on the left bank of the river.

He rose in his stirrups and looked toward Saint-Sernin.

A light glimmered in the tallest house of the village; from its chimney rose a column of reddish smoke, which evidently came from the kitchen, the very sight of which called a smile of satisfaction to the traveler's lips.

The house was that of Jacques Longuépée (Longsword). He who bore that martial name, betokening military descent, had broken with his ancestors' profession and had become a priest.

He was the curé of Saint-Sernin.

Beneath his cassock Jacques Longuépée hid limbs of Herculean proportions; he was as strong and supple as a lion, his magnificently shaped head was covered with waving locks, his intellectual face was framed by a thick beard. He looked proud and manly, but by the tones of his melodious voice, by the languid look in his handsome eyes, it was not difficult to see that he was as simple and gentle as a good child.

At the time the traveler was crossing the river, the curé was standing in the kitchen of the vicarage spurring on his housekeeper, who was busy with her oven.

“Jeanne, it is eight o'clock,” said the curé. “Jeanne, the pike will not be baked; you will not have it ready in time, and Savinien will surely be here in less than fifteen minutes.”

“Very well, very well,” muttered the old woman; “patience is not alone a virtue for the humble; a nobleman must wait too. Moreover,” she continued, with a peremptory gesture, “I shall not serve the meal until everything is done.”

With those words, she made the curé an ironical obeisance. Jacques, knowing his inferiority, with bowed head and measured tread passed out of the kitchen and entered the dining-room.

The table was set. Quite an array of bottles with dusty necks stood on the sideboard; nothing was lacking but the guest.

The clock in the tower of the little church at Saint-Sernin struck a quarter after eight; simultaneously the knocker on the door of the parsonage announced an arrival.

“It is he!” cried the curé, who rushed to the door, which he opened wide, and flung himself into the arms of our traveler.

“Truly, my dear brother,” exclaimed the latter, suffering the curé to kiss him on both cheeks, “your roof affords excellent shelter in such inclement weather, while your kitchen diffuses the odor of truffles and venison, which seems to me a foretaste of paradisaical joy.”

“Let us eat supper, my dear Savinien, let us eat supper,” said the curé, laconically, for he felt sure that his guest must be hungry after his long ride.

He took off his guest's cloak, spread it out in front

of the fire in the dining-room, and then announced their readiness to Jeanne in his loud voice.

The esquire took a seat opposite the curé, and the two men prepared to do honor to the viands cooked by Jeanne, exchanging affectionate words as they ate, for although they were but foster-brothers, they loved each other as if bound by the tie of blood.

“Brother,” said the newcomer, plunging his knife into a pasty, which was black with Perigord truffles, “brother, I have not come solely to share your excellent meal, I have a very weighty matter to confide to you.”

“I am at your service,” replied the priest. “When I received your letter, I thought at once that something was going on. Speak, I am listening.”

“At dessert, I will; first, give me some of that pike, I pray you.”

“That pike, my dear Savinien, is Jeanne’s pride. One does not eat such fish ten times in one’s life.”

“Zounds! Is it a fabulous bird?”

“Not exactly, but a wall-eyed pike out of Fonta Lake, sent to me by the Abbé of Bourdeilles on purpose for you.”

“Ah, but wall-eyed or not, it is delicious, and those mushrooms cooked in white wine give it a flavor, an aroma beyond compare!”

Conversing thus gaily they finished their meal, but as soon as Jeanne had cleared the table, had placed between the two men a tray of polished brass on which was a bottle of Armagnac whiskey and two tiny glasses, and had withdrawn, Savinien’s face assumed a serious expression.

He drank several drops of the old Armagnac



whiskey, poured out for him by his brother, rested his elbows on the table, and looking keenly into his eyes, said: "Would you like to talk of something very grave?"

## II

THE curé nodded his head in token of assent, and his face became as serious as that of his guest.

"You once vowed, Jacques," commenced the latter, "that you would consider yourself fortunate could you devote your entire life to my service."

"I am ready to keep my word, dear friend."

The nobleman extended his hand to the priest, who pressed it with such a grip, that Savinien could not help exclaiming: "Zounds! That is a hand from which anything entrusted to it could not be easily wrested." With those words he shook his fingers, aching from the curé's Herculean grasp.

"Have you property to entrust to me?" asked Longuépée.

"Valuable property, which must be guarded and if necessary defended, as the fiery dragon in the fairytale guards and defends the treasures committed to his care."

Jacques' eyes sparkled as he pointed to a long sword, hanging in a dark corner of the room.

"My ancestors' weapon," said he, "I still know how to make use of it."

"I believe you!" cried the other. "When we were both children, you gave me many a lesson; you were a bold swordsman! Ah, why did you not become a soldier?"

"God called me elsewhere," said the priest, modestly, and the light in his eyes, called into life at the

remembrance of his ancestors, vanished. "Continue, Savinien."

The knight paused for a moment; finally he said:

"I would gladly have spared you this dangerous task, for it should be undertaken by a soldier rather than a priest—but where could I find a soul as honest and true as yours, where a heart so valiant and confident, capable of undertaking the most difficult task without inquiring into its mystery. I could only think of you, therefore have I come hither."

"I am grateful to you for thinking of me, Savinien."

"Listen! The mission I would entrust to you, I took from another, and to him I gave a promise that the success of it should be assured."

"You know the life I lead, Brother, full of danger and adventure. How easily any day might a well-aimed bullet lay me low, or a blow from a dagger repay me for all those I have given."

"May God forgive you them," murmured the priest, indulgently.

"Well," continued Savinien, "were I to suddenly, the sacred legacy, whose guardian I am, would fall into the hands of others, who might be indifferent to it, or who might perhaps be interested in the possession of it. I do not desire this; no strange hand must touch it, and in this you must help me, by consecrating your intelligence and your strength to the matter. Then what would it matter were I to disappear? I should die peacefully did I know that you were ready to replace me."

"Do you want to commit your will into my keeping?" asked the curé, amazed at his brother's solemn speech.

The nobleman smiled.

"My will!" he cried. "Does a man make a will if, like the philosopher Bias, he carries all his property with him?"

"What is it, then?"

"I have already told you: it is the wish of another, that I have to execute."

Jacques Longuépée looked at his friend in astonishment.

The latter understood the mute inquiry. He drew from his jerkin a folded parchment, tied with green silk cords. These were provided with a broad seal, which must have been quite recently stamped, for there was an odor of fresh wax about it. The packet bore no address, nor did the seal bear any arms, but on a ground-work strewn with tiny stars a "C" and a "B" were oddly interwoven. The exterior, however, betrayed nothing of the enclosed secret.

Savinien laid the packet in front of his brother, and touching the seal with his finger, he said solemnly: "Jacques, therein is the future of a human being, the fate of a family, the solution of an enigma, which means life or death."

"Give it to me," said the priest, firmly.

He extended his hand and received the valuable document.

"Now, my dear Jacques,"—Savinien rose as he spoke those words,—“now listen to what I require and expect of you: Guard this package until the day on which I demand its return to me, or until you have positive proof of my death.”

"In case of the latter?" asked Jacques, with emotion.

"In that case," replied Savinien, "break the seal and you will find detailed instructions, written by me, telling you what to do with another document, likewise in this envelope and closed with a special seal."

"How about the instructions?"

"You will read them carefully, for they will help you to redeem my pledged word. You see, my good Jacques, as long as God leaves me on this earthly sphere, your office as treasure-guarding dragon will be simply a sinecure."

"Indeed."

"On the other hand, however," said the knight, with a smile—for his usual gaiety was being gradually restored—"on the other hand, you will have a difficult task should some blade fell me with his sword."

"Oho, I hope that blade is yet unborn," returned the priest in a cheery voice.

"Who knows? Still I am satisfied, for I have taken every precaution."

He drained his glass, like one contented with himself.

"But another word," implored Jacques. "In such a grave, weighty matter there cannot be instructions enough. Supposing some one should come some day and say you had sent him to demand of me the document confided to my care, what should I do?"

"If any one should come, and were it the King or even the Pope you would repulse him as an impostor."

"If he should wish to employ force?"

"Then *kill* him," replied Savinien, resolutely, pointing with an eloquent glance toward the gigantic sword hanging on the wall.

Those words in no way surprised the priest. He

was of the period when the breviary and the musket lay side by side on the ecclesiastic's table.

Therefore, instead of answering, Jacques contented himself with again pressing the hand of his brother, who knew that he had gained a resolute ally and that he could go on his way without misgiving.

The clock in the belfry of Saint-Sernin struck eleven. Savinien took his cloak and prepared to set out.

"Would you leave me so soon?"

"Yes."

"Whither are you going?"

"Over there."

Savinien pointed out of the window in the direction of the other bank of the Dordogne, where the black mass of Château Fougerolles stood out clearly against the sky in the moonlight.

Jacques asked no further questions, undoubtedly he knew the reasons which took Savinien back to Château Fougerolles.

"Shall I see you again?" was all he added.

"Certainly!"

"When?"

"Before leaving for Paris I will come here to press you to my heart again."

His horse, already saddled, was standing at the door, snorting and pawing with impatience.

"Remember your promise," Savinien whispered in his brother's ear, then he swung himself into his saddle and hurriedly set out for Fougerolles.

III.

WHEN the curé could no longer hear the sound of the horse's hoofs on the gravel, he returned to his room; he carefully locked the sealed parchment he had undertaken to guard and defend in an oak press, which was built in the wall behind his bed.

This done, he prayed fervently and besought God to protect his friend, his brother in the dangerous enterprises he was about to enter upon, and which seemed to him so much more terrible because Savinien had not revealed to him the mysterious interest which was the motive of his actions.

Meanwhile the horseman was rapidly drawing near the end of his journey. At midnight he reached the castle-moat.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, no one within the castle seemed asleep.

Lights flitted to and fro in the long corridors, the servants whispered softly one to the other in passing, while others, grave and sad, formed into groups at the entrance to the apartments occupied by the Lord of the manor.

Savinien rode into the large courtyard, threw the reins to a groom and hastily ascended the steps. On the uppermost of the first flight he met the steward.

"Well, Caprais, how are matters?" he asked.

"Ah! sir," sighed the man, "bad, very bad!"

Savinien heard no more. He cleared two steps at a time and entered a room full of people.

In the centre of that room, stretched upon an immense bed of black oak with draperies of brocaded silk, the old Count, Raymond de Lembrat, lord of Gardannes and of Fougerolles, lay dying.

The man's emaciated face stood out like ivory against the whiteness of his pillows; his arms, crossed upon his breast, seemed already dead; his eyelids were half closed over his glassy eyes; only a slight quiver of the lips betrayed the presence of the soul in the body that had succumbed to age and to disease.

A chaplain was praying at the foot of the bed. Erect, near the bedside stood a young man proud of mien and tall of stature.

He was handsome, but there was something brutal about his beauty; his eyes were tearless when they rested on the dying man's face; when turned toward the servants kneeling in the room, their glance was as sharp as steel; his lips curved at the corners, his brows frequently knit, betrayed the peremptory and merciless master; not one spark of the kindness not yet vanished from the old Count's features was visible on the young man's face. He was the Count's son, the heir of the vast domains of Gardannes, Fougerolles and Lembrat.

When Savinien appeared, he left his post and advanced to meet him.

"My father has asked for you several times, my dear Savinien," he said, in a low voice.

"I was obliged to leave Fougerolles for a few hours," replied Savinien, in the same tone. "Can the Count understand me?"

"I hope so, although the disease has made rapid progress since your departure."



"Draw nearer him, Roland, and call me by name."

Roland de Lembrat leaned toward his father and uttered Savinien's name. At the sound of it, the old man's eyes opened; with a troubled look he sought Savinien and, seeing him, he signed to him to come to his bedside.

Savinien obeyed. The Count took his hand and seemed to be collecting his strength in order to speak to him. At that moment, he caught Roland's eyes fixed upon him.

"Leave us, Roland," he said, in a cold tone; "and you also, father, if you please."

The last words were addressed to the chaplain.

Roland bit his lips with anger, while a vivid flush suffused cheeks and brow. Nevertheless, he withdrew with the chaplain to the other end of the room, leaving Savinien alone with Raymond de Lembrat.

"Listen," murmured the dying man.

Savinien bent over the Count.

What confidential words issued from that withered mouth? No one could guess; but, when Savinien stood erect, it was easy to see that the Count's eyes were full of tears. He gazed fixedly at his son, and Savinien heard him mutter, as if to himself:

"He will be the heir of the Lembrats, notwithstanding!" A tighter pressure of his hand told Savinien that his aged friend had still something to tell him. The Count essayed to raise his heavy head, and pointing to Roland de Lembrat with a gesture imperceptible to those present, he whispered in Savinien's ear:

"Keep watch over him, but—above all,—remember the other!"

## IV.

THE broad trenches which modern Paris digs through its old quarters, have brought to light a vast edifice believed by many to have disappeared, whose approaches were besieged by throngs, at the time when Corneille and a pleiad of poets, forgotten to-day, fought for the honor of seeing their works presented there: it was the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where the actors under the patronage of the King, gave their representations, which were attended by the *élite* of the Court of Anne of Austria, then Regent.

On this especial evening at this rendezvous of the elect of Court and city, was being given a representation of *Agrippine*, a tragedy much discussed by cavillers, who saw in it grave attacks upon religion and the safety of the State.

The hall of Hôtel de Bourgogne was full; a bellicose murmur passed through the brilliant and noisy throng. Two men, in a corner of the *parterre* were taking a lively part in the literary event of the evening. One, with remarkable persistence, hissed all the incriminating verses. The other contented himself with smiling at the good passages and with shrugging his shoulders when his neighbor hissed. At the end of the third act, the latter probably felt the need of expressing his indignation to some one, for, turning to the silent listener, he exclaimed:

“Is it not contemptible, sir?”

“Contemptible!” repeated the other man, coldly,  
“why should you please?”

"Because I did not think it could be possible to express sentiments so vicious in such wretched rhymes!"

"To hear you talk, sir, one would think the author a culprit?"

"A heretic, sir! He deserves excommunication."

"Indeed?"

"Has he not said outrageous things about our sacred religion?"

"Perhaps you misunderstood them. This is what he says."

And he forthwith proceeded to recite a whole passage from the tragedy of *Agrippine*, to be followed by another and still another, becoming more and more animated as he recited.

"Ah! sir," asked his neighbor, in amazement, "how can you remember so many lines?"

"Do you confess that they are not bad?"

"I confess it."

"Why then did you hiss them just now?"

"Look at the crowd! . . . A number of others seem to be of my opinion!"

"Poor men! One ass begins to bray, the others follow. . . ."

"That is insolence, sir!"

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"So much the worse for you! But, sh! the fourth act is commencing; do not let us make any noise."

"Very well; we will resume our conversation shortly, and in another way."

"Is Monsieur from the provinces?" the elocutionist, likewise provoked, inquired of his adversary in a tone of raillery.

"I am the Marquis de Lozerolles."

"A noble family of Poitou! Pardon me! Permit me to listen to Séjanus."

The actors were on the stage. The altercation stopped there. It had not, however, caused any scandal, the two men having exchanged their attacks with the most exquisite politeness, as was becoming in men well-born.

At the conclusion of the play, the Marquis' adversary beckoned to a young man two or three paces from him, who advanced eagerly.

"Count," he said to him, "will you be my second?"

"Why?"

"I am about to fight a duel!"

"This evening?"

"This instant!"

"Another quarrel! And you were not out of the hall!"

"It was not necessary for me to leave the hall, for the gentleman was there!"

The Marquis de Lozerolles, thus pointed out, bowed courteously.

"What was the cause?"

"A very simple one. Monsieur thought *Agrippine* detestable, I thought it excellent. Does that reason suffice you?"

"Perfectly."

"Come, sirs," interposed the Marquis, "I am in haste."

Lozerolles asked the assistance of a friend, as his antagonist had, and the four men set out for one of the unfrequented lanes near Hôtel de Bourgogne. Without delay swords were drawn.

"Pest! sir," cried the Marquis, after fencing vainly in order to make his way, "you are a formidable gamester."

"Am I not? You are playing a provincial game now."

"Bah! they are not one-armed in the provinces," replied the Marquis, returning the raillery with a thrust.

"No more are they in Paris," said the other, parrying the blow and following it by a thrust so unforeseen that his sword passed through the Marquis' arm, without giving him time to return it.

The combat was ended.

"My compliments," said the wounded man, as his vanquisher calmly sheathed his sword. "It matters not, the lines of *Agrippine* are no better by it, but I *would* still like to know why you recite them so well."

"Because I am the author of them, sir Marquis!" And, leaving the Marquis stunned by that revelation, the poet, who so bravely defended his work with his sword, withdrew, leaning on his second's arm.

This poet is no stranger to us. We have seen him at the table of the euré of Saint-Sernin and at Count de Lembrat's deathbed.

He had, it is necessary to say first of all, for it was the characteristic feature of that original physiognomy, he had a nose of surprising dimensions, markedly curved, shading his mouth, in fact an "heroic nose," according to the expression of one of his biographers. That remarkable nose held sway over a face of regularity and sweetness, lighted by beautiful black eyes, large and full of brilliance. The brows were delicately traced; the rather slight moustache left his

lips free; his hair fell in brown masses around an intelligent forehead. The whole constituted a handsome man, who, in those days of mad pranks, occupied a position of honor among the refined and the learned.

His name was Savinien de Cyrano. He was, however, better known by that of Cyrano de Bergerac; which he had taken to distinguish himself from his brother and his cousins.

He was the author of the *Voyage à la Lune*, *Entretiens pointus*, the poet of *Agrippine*, the rhymer of a hundred burlesques, the audacious philosopher; he was also the mad duellist, the hero of all quarrels. He had twenty, yes, a hundred surnames of honor: he was called the Intrepid, the Demon of Bravery, *Captain Satan*;—among the people especially that name clung to him, and many knew him by no other. Together with all that, his heart was of gold, his independence thoroughly tried, he loved all good, he hated blockheads, and he was beloved, for his genius accommodated to the taste of the epoch, for his ready wit, for his cheery youth; he left behind him the memory of lasting friendships and of absolute devotion, which is very rare.

\* \* \* \* \*

Having saluted the Marquis, Cyrano withdrew, as we have said, leaning on his second's arm. The title of Count just given the second by Bergerac, belonged to him by virtue of the death of Lembrat, senior; the Roland with the haughty face whom we have already seen standing unmoved at his father's deathbed, was the new Lord of Fougerolles.

Count Raymond de Lembrat had been dead more

than a year, and Roland's mourning had been brief. He was five-and-twenty and rich; he thirsted for gay life in a large city from which his father had carefully guarded him.

Cyrano de Bergerac, older and more experienced, was his model, and although he did not feel any very great sympathy with the poet, no doubt on account of the strong friendship Count Raymond had always shown him, he asked him to become his guide and mentor in the brilliant world he was about to enter.

"This was the epoch when the beautiful Spanish and Italian adventuresses, proud and voluptuous creatures, held their sway, loving with equal ardor, gold, blood and perfume: it was the epoch of scaled balconies, of ladders of silk, of ballets and masquerades; of that Spanish gallantry, at once serious and mad, devoted almost to foolishness, ardent to ferocity; of sonnets and of rhymes, of sword thrusts, of bumpers and of unbridled gambling."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the whirlpool into which Cyrano launched his young friend.

In that intoxicating world, Savinien lived as a poet, a philosopher; Roland rushed into it headlong, eager to taste all the savory fruits, to drink of all the foaming goblets. In less than a year he had a place among the *élite*. He had squandered money, had swelled the number of entertainments, had dazzled the women with his splendor had subdued the men by his audacity; he was speedily intoxicated by that regimen.

After intoxication comes lassitude. He felt the necessity of controlling his passion, of settling down.

<sup>1</sup>Théophile Gautier: *Les Grottesques*.

In that again Cyrano served him to the purpose. Being a friend of the Marquis de Faventines, who occupied an old mansion on the island of Saint-Louis, and whose establishment was quite modest, a lengthy suit having considerably impaired his fortune, Savinien had spoken to him of young Count de Lembrat, and had finally presented him to him. In that house Roland found the refuge he desired.—A maiden, the Marquis' only child, was there.—Her name was Gilberte; she was nineteen; Poland fell in love with her, and, like a sensible youth, he sought no other confidant for his love than the Marquis himself.

Then, as at present, no one married a girl without a dowry. The father welcomed that son-in-law as a miraculous Godsend, and, in two months, what he called Gilberte's "happiness" was determined upon.

As for the maiden, consulted merely as a matter of form, she answered: yes, without any objections, her heart being probably free, and her wit sufficiently quick to see that it would not be wise to scorn an union so advantageous. The matter being launched thus favorably, negotiations were speedily made, and Count de Lembrat was solemnly received at the house as the betrothed of beautiful Gilberte de Faventines.

In the spring of the year 1653, he enjoyed that enviable position.

For two months Gilberte had had time to become accustomed to the thought of becoming a Countess. She awaited that result without desiring it. Indeed, she would gladly have taken back her promise, had not the unalterable respect inculcated by her parents imperiously restrained her.



V.

THE Hôtel de Faventines was built at the end of a garden whose gate opened on the shore of the Seine. It afforded a picturesque view, and Gilberte liked to sit on the terrace overlooking the river, to dream, to read or to talk with Pâquette, her maid and *confidante* as well. One morning, the two young girls were in their favorite place, beneath the shade of a plane-tree, the branches of which reached as far as the quay. They were talking, and their conversation was very important no doubt, for their voices were lowered, and they were so near each other that Gilberte's brown locks mingled with Pâquette's fair curls.

Gilberte's cheeks were as pink as peach-blossoms in April, and the charming color increased as the conversation went on.

"Has this mystery been of long duration, mademoiselle?" asked Pâquette, on hearing a lengthy story from her mistress' lips.

"Three weeks."

"Indeed!"

"Every day, for three weeks I have found a bouquet on my balcony, and in the bouquet, verses. . . ."

"It is easy to give a bouquet daily, but verses! Either the unknown gallant has a mind more fertile than our fashionable authors, or . . . or, mademoiselle, he has a stock of love verses for all cases."

"You are naughty."

"Will you permit me to be curious as well?"

“Why?”

“Because I should like to ask you a question.”

“Speak!”

“Well! your hand on your heart, in what mood did you look upon these verses and bouquets?”

“I am, I think, somewhat silly, Pâquette.”

“That is no answer.”

“Well.—To be frank I was greatly annoyed at the unknown’s audacity.”

“Naturally,—but . . . after that?”

“After that, I became accustomed to it.”

“So that now? . . .”

“Now, it seems to me that I cannot be vexed with him for his discreet homage, having tolerated it thus.”

“You do not know him, truly?”

“I do not know him, I swear.”

“Do you suspect no one?”

“No one.”

“Not even Count de Leubrat, your *fiancé*?”

“Him! You cannot think so! He sees me every day; he talks to me with perfect freedom. Why should he offer me verses and flowers anonymously?”

“It is a delicate attention.”

“No.”

“A test, perhaps?”

“The Count has no more need to win me than to try me. He is as sure of my loyalty as of my father’s word.”

“Then, all this is to lead you to nothing?”

“To nothing, I have told you; in a month I shall be married. The memory of this strange adventure will leave me but one more regret.”

"One more regret? You see, you do not love M. de Lembrat; you do not love him, and you allow yourself to wed him."

"What would you have me do?"

"I would have you rebel," cried Pâquette, with a bewitching toss of her head, "I would have you say 'no.' Truly! I should not fail to do so!"

"You, my poor child, are free. You have not to save the pride of a family, to protect the nobility of a name."

"That is true. However. . . ."

"Even were I to say no," continued Gilberte, sadly, "my father's will would be stronger than my resistance. Ah, but you are happy, Pâquette! You can love, and that is forbidden me."

The sound of voices was heard in the garden. Gilberte rose in confusion. Almost simultaneously the Count, upon whose arm leaned the Marchioness de Faventines, appeared. At the sight of him, Gilberte could not restrain a slight exclamation.

"Did I startle you, Mademoiselle?" asked Roland.

"You simply surprised me," replied Gilberte, trying to smile.

Having kissed his *fiancée's* hand, Count de Lembrat seated himself beside the Marchioness, on a stone bench built around the plane-tree.

At a signal from her mother, Gilberte took a seat near her. But, instead of paying attention to what was taking place around her, her eyes soon wandered into space and she fell into a deep reverie. Roland looked at her for a moment keenly.

"You seem sad, Mademoiselle," he finally said; "what has happened?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Gilberte; "pray, excuse me."

"It is strange!" reflected Roland, in a low tone, frowning imperceptibly.

Having taken that tone of coldness, the conversation threatened to cease. The Count, feeling it necessary to remove that oppression, did not reply to Gilberte's last word. In retaliation, he drew from his pocket a small jewel-box, stamped with the Faventines' arms, and placed it open before the maiden's eyes.

"Mademoiselle," the Count then ventured to say, "I know that you are interested in works of art; deign to accept this trinket, which I had chased for you by a Florentine master-jeweler."

Gilberte glanced with polite admiration at the wonder offered her.

"It is very rich, indeed," she said, with glaring indifference.

"How!" exclaimed the Marchioness, at that juncture, "can you not thank M. de Lembrat better, Gilberte?"

"Never mind, madame," interposed Roland, with a shade of bitterness, "I expect no thanks."

"My mother is right; I had forgotten where and before whom I was; thank you, sir, your attentions touch me deeply."

Gilberte uttered those words without extending her hand toward her *fiancé*, nor did a smile light up her face.

"As cold as marble! Am I deceived?"

A painful silence followed. Fortunately for the three personages in that scene, of which Pâquette was a silent witness, the Marquis' arrival diverted the

thoughts which agitated them. The Marquis was not alone. Savinien de Cyrano accompanied him.

The gentleman advanced gallantly toward the ladies, whom he saluted very low, sweeping the ground with the plume in his hat, as fashion demanded.

"Ah, M. de Bergerac," the Marchioness hastened to say, happy to escape from the constraint which possessed her, "how pleased I am to see you! You have used us harshly for two weeks, I think! Were you ill?"

"Yes," said Cyrano, gaily, taking advantage of the opportunity for one of those plays on words of which he was so fond, "yes, I was troubled with the tierce and the quarte."

"Which means," explained Roland, "that you fought!"

"Oh! in spite of myself; my friends are wrong in saying that I am the leader of men, for in a week I have not ceased being the second of everybody. I supported Brisailles' quarrel, who fought I do not know why, and that of Canillac and, on my part, I gained two slashes there, which my nose still shows."

"Those are popular quarrels," said the Marquis. "They say you have more serious ones."

"What are they, if you please, Marquis?"

"Do they not say that you had a quarrel with Poquelin, who had cunningly stolen a scene of your comedy, the *Pédant*, in order to adapt it to the farce which he calls *Les Fourberies de Scapin*?"

"Oh, yes! I know what you mean."

"You take the matter very calmly, it seems to me."

"Bah!" said the poet, shrugging his shoulders, "if Molière steals my works, people know it, and I have

no need for vengeance. Moreover, if he steals my thoughts it is a mark of his esteem for me; he would not take them, did he not think them good."

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you know what offends me? It is to see that he attributes to his imagination the good offices which his memory renders him, and calls himself the father of certain children of whom he is at the most only the midwife."

A burst of laughter greeted that speech. The ice was broken. Cyrano's good-humor had brightened all faces.

"Bergerac, my friend," said the Marquis, "you are better than your reputation."

"Do not let us speak of my reputation; if it is bad, it is because I have given my enemies the chance to make it so. Let us speak rather of your happiness, my dear Roland, of your family joys, Sir Marquis; you should have a great deal to tell me."

"Only one thing, but the gladdest of all for me," said Roland: "Mlle. Gilberte will become my wife in a month."

"Happy mortal who knows the date of his happiness in advance!"

Then, observing the embarrassment that Roland's declaration caused Gilberte, he said to himself: "Aha! the child seems to care but little for the future prepared for her."

Having reflected thus, he was about to go, when the Marquis stopped him.

"Will you dine with us, M. de Bergerac?"

"I cannot; I must fly."

"So quickly?"

"I am expected at Hôtel de Bourgogne."

"A pretext, I'll wager!"

"The pretext is of flesh and bone; it is Sulpice Castellan, the excellent youth who copies my verses and carries my challenges."

"Well, he will wait for you, that is all."

"Yes, remain," interposed Gilberte; "after dinner you must recite us some passages from your latest work."

"If you command," chivalrously replied the poet, "I no longer have an atom of will. I will stay. Would you like, ladies, while awaiting dinner, to take a stroll to the Pont-Neuf? They say that Brioché is giving a farce there in which I am maliciously put on the stage, to the great delight of the loungers."

Cyrano was about to continue the enumeration of the attractions which the Pont-Neuf would offer that day, when his attention was attracted by music very bizarre in character, which came from the quay.

The *virtuosi* were two men and a woman, all three young, all three wearing picturesque costumes of brilliant colors.

Leaning upon the terrace-rail, Savinien scrutinized them with an artist's curiosity. The group was indeed striking.

The woman looked very beautiful in her multi-colored garments; the two men stationed themselves boldly before her and carried their tinsel superbly.

Forgetting both Brioché and the Pont-Neuf altogether, as well as the farce in which he was satirized, Cyrano turned toward the Marquis, crying:

"Zounds, M. de Faventines, why do you not admit those strolling musicians, who are caterwauling on

the quay? They present a fine appearance, and would like to come nearer, I fancy."

"Surely," agreed the Marquis. "Would you like them, Gilberte?"

"As you wish, papa. Call them, M. de Cyrano."

"Ho, there!" cried the poet, "come hither and enter! We desire to judge of your merit."



VI.

PÂQUETTE opened the gate leading to the quay; the three musicians entered and stood before their noble audience.

On perceiving Cyrano, one of the two men made a hastily suppressed movement, and arranged his thick black curls over his eyes.

Had the poet observed that movement and had he sought the cause of it, he would not have failed to recognize in the strolling *virtuoso*, the beggar who had not long since stopped him on the road to Fongerolles. But, besides having probably forgotten the adventure, Cyrano was busily engaged for the moment in examining the features of the other Bohemian. He was quite young; he had fair hair, a tall, slender form, and on his face, somewhat tanned by the sun of all lands, was visible an expression of melancholy pride.

Of what was Cyrano thinking as he gazed at him? He would undoubtedly have had difficulty in saying himself, for he soon shook his head as if to dispel ungrounded preoccupation, and advancing toward the one who seemed to be the leader of the troop, he said:

“Begin your music, if you can do nothing better to entertain these noble personages.”

The highwayman took a step forward, and disguising his voice as well as possible, for he remembered the threat made by Cyrano, as well as the lesson received, he said:

"Every one does not like music, sir. We have something else to offer you."

"What?"

"I am a juggler; my sister, Zilla, tells fortunes, and my partner, Manuel, is an extemporizer of merit, as well as a fine lute-player."

"We are now embarrassed as to choice," scoffed Cyrano. And turning to the youth designated as Manuel, he asked:

"Are you a poet, my boy?"

"Sometimes, my lord."

"Then we are brothers. By Apollo, I salute you."

The young man bowed.

"Thank you, M. de Cyrano," he replied, courteously.

"You know me?"

"As does all Paris."

"It is singular," thought Cyrano at that moment; "those features are familiar to me, I seem to have heard that voice."

Thoughtfully he examined his interlocutor's whole person.

"What is the matter, dear friend?" asked Roland, surprised at the expression of Savinien's face.

The poet was himself again.

"Nothing," he answered. "I am examining my *confrère*. A poet is always a curious animal to look at."

A pause ensued during which, at this meeting of personages so diverse, there was a strange interchange of glances.

Cyrano continued his scrutiny of Manuel; Manuel gazed passionately at Gilberte, possessed in her presence by an indefinable emotion.

Zilla watched Manuel with eyes full of lightning; Roland looked from one to the other, seeking the meaning of the strange scene.

As for the man with the black hair, he looked at no one, his only care was that no one should look at him. Cyrano's presence embarrassed him greatly.

The poet approached Gilberte.

"Come, lovely maid so full of care, Zilla will cast your horoscope," he proposed. "Do you wish it?"

"Why not?"

So Gilberte joined the group. The fortune-teller took her hand.

"Read it without fear," said Gilberte, emphatically.

"I am not afraid to hear my destiny. What do you see?"

"Love in the shadow; surprise and deception; a terrible struggle; after the struggle, possibly happiness, possibly death."

The young girl withdrew her hand.

"Thank you," said she, simply.

"As obscure as an ancient oracle," remarked Cyrano, in a tone of raillery. "Now, mine, my beautiful sybil."

"You, my lord," said Zilla, "will have a short but fruitful life, persecution and combats."

"That is what I like. You speak well, my girl! And the end?"

"I cannot say how you will die."

"By a sword-thrust, doubtless? That fate would suit me well."

"No," said Zilla, having again consulted the lines in the gentleman's hand.

"I accept the augury. Now, it is your turn, Roland."

"It is useless," objected the Count; "I do not believe in predictions."

"Nor I, indeed; but these poor devils must earn their money."

"Very well, then."

And, in his turn, Roland submitted to the soothsayer's examination.

"You were right to hesitate," said she, in a deep, grave voice, "your hand is a strange book."

"Indeed!"

"All is obscure and mysterious in these lines. Allow me to reflect a little my lord."

"Are there then terrible things written there?"

"Possibly!"

With bowed head, with fixed eye, Zilla seemed to isolate herself in solemn contemplation.

While all those present were watching the scene, a young man modestly dressed, with sprightly step and roguish face, quietly joined the company.

It was Sulpice Castellan, Cyrano's scribe, who, not having found his master at Hôtel de Bourgogne, had come to look for him at Hôtel de Faventines.

Cyrano made a sign to him which meant:

"Do not speak, but wait, I have need of you."

Roland de Lembrat commenced to grow impatient at the slowness of his oracle.

"Speak," he said to Zilla. "You see we are awaiting your decree."

But Zilla shook her head, and pushed away the Count's hand:

"No," she murmured, "I cannot tell you that."

"Mysterious? That is adroit."

The seeress turned her keen eyes upon the mocking ones of the skeptic, and in a penetrating voice she corrected:

"It is wise . . . for your peace of mind."

The Count shrugged his shoulders, and turning away, said:

"Enough of juggling; let us sing some love-song; I like that better."

The chief of the trio interfered.

"That is Manuel's business."

Then to his companion:

"Collect yourself, my friend, and sing one of your improvisations for these lovely ladies."

In spite of those words, the singer's embarrassment was evident. First of all, he looked at Gilberte with an air almost wild, and bowed his head as if crushed beneath the weight of an overwhelming thought. Then, a gleam of energy sparkled in his eyes; he raised his head, possessed by an audacious inspiration, and flinging back his fair hair, he advanced toward Mlle. de Faventines.

Gilberte leaned her head on Pâquette's shoulder.

"That man's glance disturbs me in spite of myself," she murmured in her pretty maid's ear.

"He has a bold and haughty air," replied the latter, in a low voice.

Cyrano had assumed a pensive air in the presence of the extemporizer, who absorbed the general attention.

Manuel played a soft prelude, then in a voice, sweetly vibrating, somewhat unsteady at first, but

growing firmer as the poetic movement inspired him, he hummed these verses :

“Parce que je ne suis qu’un enfant de Bohême,  
Élevé dans la bauge et ne dans le ruisseau ;  
Parce que je vis loin de la femme que j’aime,  
Que je rampe à ses pieds comme le ver misseau ;  
Parce qu’elle n’a pas de son sourire auguste  
Éclairé cette nuit où fleurit mon amour,  
Dois-je étouffer mon cœur, et treuve-t-elle injuste  
Que je veuille étaler ma blessure au grand jour ?”

“My God !” murmured Gilberte, trembling.  
Manuel continued :

“Elle passera calme et fière sur ma route ;  
Jamais ses yeux charmants ne chercheront mes yeux ;  
Et je n’éveilleraé pas même un chaste doute  
Dans cet esprit plus pur que la clarté des cieux.  
Le paradis du pauvre est fait de chose :  
Volontiers, je mourrai de mon humble bonheur,  
Si je puis, confiant mes baisers à la rose,  
Voir sa lèvre aspirer mon âme avec la fleur.”

Either accidentally or with premeditation, the extemporizer had stationed himself near a large stone vase around which were entwined the graceful branches of a white rosebush. On concluding those lines in a melodious sigh, he put out his hand, gathered a rose, pressed it furtively to his lips, and, bending his knee before Gilberte, he presented it to her with closed eyes, as if he were about to faint with emotion.

With sparkling eyes, with curled lips, Roland rushed toward him.

“Insolent fellow !” he exclaimed.

And he rudely snatched the flower from the adventurer’s hand to crush it beneath his heel.

Manuel was enraged at the insult; but beneath the Count's contemptuous glance, his brow, flushed with anger, suddenly clouded over. He drew back. He saw and confessed his impotence.

All that was as quick as thought.

"What are you doing, Roland," interposed Cyrano in a calm voice, "what are you taking offense at? It is this man's *rôle*: he recites verses, he offers a flower; it is perfectly innocent."

"Did you not see his glance? Did you not understand that insulting allusion?"

"Child that you are,"—Savinien took the Count's hand,—“are you jealous of a Bohemian?"

"Leave me alone."

And pointing out to Manuel the garden gate, he said:

"Go, knave, if you do not wish me to chase you out with a stick."

"Pardon," replied Manuel, in a cold tone and without retreating a step; "if you were to strike me with a stick, I would be man enough to return your blows with sword-thrusts."

A burst of scornful laughter escaped Roland's lips.

"A beggar!" he cried; "go!"

"Count," exclaimed Gilbete, casting herself between the two adversaries.

Roland seized her hand:

"Fear not, mademoiselle; if I am jealous of all who come in contact with you, I also know how to pay for the diversion obtained for you. There, knave."

He flung his purse to Manuel.

"Thanks," replied the young man, rejecting it with his foot; "I have been paid."

Zilla's brother, less disdainful, quickly picked it up, bowed ceremoniously, and said :

“I do not work for pleasure, my lord ; I accept it.”

Mamel retired slowly, not like a man who is chased, but like a combatant proudly leaving the arena. His two companions followed him.

Whilst Roland watched their withdrawal with a moody air, Pâquette heard her mistress say sadly :

“Oh, my dear, he is a Bohemian. Everything forbids me to love now ; my dream is ended.”

“Go,” Cyrano bade Sulpice Castellan at the same time, “follow those people who have just been sent away ; I must know where to find them.”



VII.

ON leaving Hôtel de Faventines, the three itinerant musicians turned toward the Pont-Neuf, which was at that time the quarter frequented by jugglers, lackeys, sharpers and pickpockets. Zilla walked on in advance, with bowed head, full of thought. Mammel, on the contrary, looked up at the sky; his breast heaved, swelled by a breath of triumphant pride. He loved! He, the obscure, the humble, he had had the supreme good fortune to be able to rise in a moment of audacious inspiration to the level of the woman he adored. For one moment she had felt his eyes fixed passionately on hers, for one moment she had been his entirely. They had insulted, threatened, driven him out! What mattered it to him? The Bohemian, the forlorn child, who had no ties, who had no origin, had made the heart of a patrician beat, if not with love, at least with pity.

That sufficed him, as he had said in his feverish improvisation. He was happy; being unable to claim more, his artistic and visionary soul placed all its future joy in a memory; he knew that henceforth he would occupy a place in Gilberte's mind.

That thought was his treasure, the price of his boldness, his consolation in his misery. And like a madman, seeking in space the phantom of his dream, he walked along without looking around him, bowing the passers-by, stumbling against stones, running into mile-posts, dazed, intoxicated, blinded!

His companion brought him back to stern reality.

"Ah, Manuel," he cried, in a mocking tone, "have you lost your senses and your voice?"

"Why that question, Ben-Joël?"

"Why?" repeated Ben-Joël, "because I have spoken to you three times, without receiving the honor of a reply."

"Excuse me, and be kind enough to repeat what you said."

"I simply asked you if. . . ."

"If?"

"But no! that does not concern me after all."

"Speak, I pray you."

"I asked you for the explanation of the scene just enacted."

"What scene?"

"That gallant improvisation addressed to the young girl."

"I fancy you have guessed all?"

"Do you really love her?" asked Ben-Joël, greatly astonished.

"Yes," replied Manuel, in a penetrating voice.

"Bah! What will it lead to?"

"To nothing!"

"Strange boy!" murmured the Bohemian. "Then, you made that mad declaration, as others fight, merely for pleasure?"

"Precisely."

"And Zilla?"

"What! Zilla?"

"Did you not see that she was being tortured?"

At that remark, Manuel stared fixedly at his companion.

“Tortured?” he repeated.

“Yes, the poor child is accustomed to see in you the man she will marry,—for it was my father’s wish that you should be united,—and she is jealous, you see, jealous with all the strength of love.”

A frown knit Manuel’s brows. He quickened his pace as if to rid himself of his companion’s conversation, and said in a cold voice:

“You are mistaken, Zilla does not love me. She has never dreamed of what you say.”

Ben-Joël had no opportunity to reply. Manuel had rejoined Zilla and walked by her side, thus putting an end to further questioning.

Sulpice Castillan walked quietly along behind the group, according to Cyrano’s instructions. As he went on, he said to himself:

“What in the devil can my master want to know about this jail-bird for?”

Contrary to Sulpice’s supposition, the three adventurers passed the Pont-Neuf, which he thought would be their stopping-place, and entered a miserable-looking house beyond the porte de Nesle, in the quarter now the aristocratic Faubourg Saint-Germain. Roland’s purse, so hurriedly picked up by Ben-Joël, was full enough so that on that day there was no need to cast the good Parisian’s horoscope, nor to give feats of jugglery. In that company of which Ben-Joël was the chief, they lived from hand to mouth.

Sulpice Castillan remained in front of the door of the old house for some time, long enough to assure himself that the Bohemians would not leave it, and that it was indeed their place of abode. Then, as it was in the very quarter in which he lived with Cyr-

ano, Castillan continued on his way and reached his master's house.

Savinien's impatience must have been very great, for on the morning of the following day, after receiving an exact account of Castillan's proceedings, he took his sword, put in his pocket a small box which he took from a chest on the mantelpiece in his room, and turned toward the house occupied by Manuel.

Castillan had given him a faithful description of the house, and at his first words, he had recognized it as the one that the students, frequent visitors in the quarter, had christened the House of Cyclops. It was a high, narrow building, made of beams and of strong joists held together with plaster, becoming entangled, like gigantic arms, in one confused mass. A low door, iron-bound, was in an angle. There was not one window on the first floor of the façade. One large bay alone broke the straight line of the black wall the entire height of the edifice, between the two slate-colored eaves, full of green moss, and from which, like a head of hair, hung tufts of grass. That sole aperture, enclosed by a large leaded glass, occasionally at night, gave out a reddish light. It was like an eye in the centre of a giant's forehead. For that reason the students always ready with mythological comparisons, had called the house,—dark and silent by day, full of light and noises at night,—the House of Cyclops.

The *bourgeois* talked of it with a sort of fear. Rumor said that diabolical deeds took place there. It was the haunt of sorcerers or at least of counterfeiterers and of bandits.

Cyrano, who feared nothing, and who, in accordance with his name of the duelist, which he counte-

nanced himself, felt strong enough to extinguish the sun in the firmament like a mere candle, Cyrano knocked loudly at the low door. A long silence followed his summons. Then a heavy step was heard on the wooden stairs, and the door opened, disclosing to view the face of an old woman, as yellow and wrinkled as an apple six months old.

Through the crack of the door, which the woman prudently held half open, Cyrano could indistinctly see some rags hanging on the walls, and something like pallets arranged in the shadow around a table, while a stale, sour odor penetrated his nostrils.

"What do you want?" asked the old woman.

"I desire to speak to a young man who lives in this house."

"A young man? We have ten of them," said the custodian of the dwelling, with a laugh; "what is his name?"

"Manuel, I believe."

"Ah! I know then. . . ."

"Well? Where is he?"

"He has gone out with Ben-Joël and Zilla, his associates."

"Where shall I find them?"

"At the Pont-Neuf, probably."

"Thank you."

And, as the heads of rogues ready for all occasions ranged themselves in the darkness, behind the old portress, Cyrano slipped a small coin into the latter's hand and turned toward the Pont-Neuf.

It was scarcely ten o'clock in the forenoon, and already a dense and clamorous throng was assembled at the approaches to the *pont*. That throng surrounded

a puppet-show located near the moat of the porte de Nesles, opposite rue Guénégnad.

The proprietor and *impresario* of that show was no other than the illustrious Jean Briocci, or Brioché, of whom we have before made mention and who has left a name in theatrical history.

Deafening music issued from Brioché's booth. He soon appeared himself, followed by his partner, Violon. At the sight of him the throng quieted down. The idlers contented themselves with looking at one another and winking significantly. Evidently they were awaiting some event full of interest.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Brioché, with a strongly marked Italian accent, "before opening the doors of my booth to you, I wish to give you a fore-taste of the beautiful things you will see there."

"Such as the adventures of the humpbacked buffoon," interrupted Violon, "the unequalled puppet, a wonderful amusement for people troubled with spleen."

A terrible kick, the classic kick of outlandish shows, cut short Violon's eloquence.

Brioché continued:

"You have, ladies and gentlemen, heard tell of my monkey, Fagotin, the wonder of wonders."

"Yes, Fagotin! Fagotin!" cried the crowd, put in good-humor by that preamble.

"Well!" thundered the orator, "I will show you the wonder and it shall not cost you a red cent, as I showed him to you yesterday, as I will show him to you to-morrow."

He made a sign. Violon vanished and soon returned, leading a monkey with head dressed in the

most ridiculous fashion, and walking with comical affectation.

A burst of unanimous laughter welcomed that entrance.

“Ah, it is he! Ha, Fagotin! Ha! fine M. de Bergerac!”

In order to explain that clamoring, we must say that the ape Fagotin was nothing but a striking caricature of Cyrano. The facetious reproduction of the manners, the costume and the proud carriage of the poet, had cost Brioché great pains.

The ape, according to an account of the hero of our story was “as fat as an Amiens pâte, as tall as a cockcomb, as full of buffoonery as the devil; Brioché had put on his head an old hat, made of the wool of the vigon plume, on which hid the holes, the cracks and the gum; his neck was encircled by a ruff à la *Scaramonche* and he wore a doublet with six skirts, trimmed with lace and aiglets.”

“Look at him, what a fine appearance he presents,” cried Brioché, joining in the gaiety of the audience.

Turning to the animal, he said:

“Come, fearless one! Come, my fine Captain Satan! slayer of giants, slasher of mountains, of throats, show us what you can do.”

The throng became all ears and all eyes. Those admiring the caricature, did not perceive the real Cyrano, who had just paused, in his turn, in front of the booth in the rear ranks of the spectators. On discovering what the noise was all about, on learning positively that it was indeed his burlesqued effigy offered to the idlers' jests, Cyrano felt his blood boil in his veins. His nose,—his nose so villainously satirized,—

inhaled the air fiercely; the poet would have liked to have fallen upon the stupid crowd which made sport of a man of his worth, with his sword, but curiosity was stronger within him than anger. He restrained his feelings and waited.

"Come," resumed Brioché, borrowing his language from Cyrano's works and talking to the ape, "we know that you carry at your side the grave digger's foster-mother; that the head of the last Sultan has made the pommel of your sword; that with the wind from your hat you can submerge a navy, and that whosoever would know the number of men you have killed has only to take a nine with all the grains of sand in the sea to serve as zeros. Watch! We will give a performance."

The ape, marvelously erect, drew his sword and pretended to fence. In doing so, he imitated Cyrano's movements so ludicrously, that the latter laughed with the crowd.

Whilst Fagotin continued his exercises, a footman spied the gentleman's head. He whispered several words in his neighbor's ear; the news spread from one to the other, and soon a great clamor arose.

"He is there! It is he! It is Cyrano! It is the bewitched! Guard, Fagotin! here is your shadow!"

And the throng began to look first at the poet then at the ape, comparing one with the other with such boisterous merriment that Savinien lost patience.

"Ha! knaves!" he cried, "will you lower your voices and clear the way?"

A footman took it upon himself to reply for all the rest. He took his hat in his hand, and, approaching Cyrano, said:



“Pardon, sir, is that your everyday nose? What a devil of a nose! Please move back; it prevents me from seeing.”

It was the direst of offences to speak to Cyrano of his nose. He drew himself up like a fighting-cock, unsheathed his sword, and, without crying, Out of the way! he rushed upon the crowd, which deafened him with its moekery.

In a trice the place was cleared. Cyrano had before him no other enemy than the ape, *Fagotin*, which, armed like a gentleman, pretended to cross swords.

Savinien, beside himself, treated the ape as he would have a footman. He made a lunge at him that spitted him.

At the sight of the dead ape, *Brioché* began to whimper in the most piteous fashion. Cyrano, appeased by the bloody reparation, calmly watched him embrace the victim of the accident.

“Oh, M. de Cyrano,” finally said the Merry Andrew, in whom fear engendered a prudent reserve, “I swear that I will sue you, and it will cost you at least fifty pistoles.”

“Wait a little,” replied Cyrano, “I will pay you in money for the ape, and you will not have stolen it.”

He then returned his sword to its sheath, readjusted his hat, and with a steady step crossed the entire *pont*, seeking to recognize Manuel and his companions in the crowd just now so insolent, but that now prudently cleared away before him.

The face of the extemporizer was not to be seen.

The gentleman returned to rue Guénégaud, resolved to return to the House of Cyclops there to await Manuel, when he found himself in Zilla's presence.

"Ha, my lovely child," he exclaimed, with satisfaction, "one word, I pray you."

Zilla looked at the man who approached her so boldly, and, recognizing him, she stopped, awaiting the question he wished to ask.

Behind Zilla was Ben-Joël, who was trying to hide his face, which the sight of Savinien had darkened strangely.

"Tell me," resumed the poet, "if the young man who was at Hôtel de Faventines yesterday is in some unknown hole of the Pont-Neuf, for, on my word, I have strained my eyes to find him?"

"Manuel?" asked the fortune-teller.

"Yes."

"He is not with us this morning."

"Ah! And where is he, might I know?"

"Here is my brother who can answer you better than I."

Zilla bowed slightly to the gentleman and mingled with the throng, leaving Ben-Joël in an embarrassing *tête-à-tête*.

The Bohemian was on the point of slipping wisely away, when Savinien's hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Are you as shy as your sister," said the poet at the same time; "do you also refuse to reply?"

"Sir . . ." stammered the Bohemian.

The tone of that supplicating voice undoubtedly awoke a tardy reminiscence in Cyrano's mind, for he sought to look at his companion's face, while the latter obstinately kept his head bowed.

"Pardon me!" he said.

And without any ceremony he put his hand under the adventurer's chin and exposed his face to the light.

"Ah, ah!" he then exclaimed, "so it is you?"

"You have recognized me, my lord."

"Zounds, knave, it is not your fault, you hid yourself with enough care."

"What would you have? I was ashamed."

"Hypocrite! when I met you, I almost promised to have you arrested when I should have the leisure, do you remember?"

"I remember; but forget it, my lord. That night I was far from my kindred, I was hungry, I yielded to temptation."

"Hum! a temptation that has often been renewed."

"I am an honest man at bottom."

"To find that bottom, it would be necessary to dig very deep down."

"I swear to you. . . ."

"To be brief: I have found you, and just at the moment when I need you most. In consideration of that I renounce my rights to your hide, rogue."

"I do not renounce my vengeance," muttered the bandit.

Then in a humble tone he said:

"I am yours, my lord. In what can I serve you?"

"Where is Manuel?"

"At the porch of Nôtre Dame, but at eleven o'clock he should rejoin me at the house."

"Let us go thither; we will wait for him."

"Will you go to my house?"

"Why not?"

"Because. . . ."

"Is your dirty hole a cut-throat place into which an honest man should not venture?"

"Certainly not."

“Then, come.”

Ben-Joël obeyed reluctantly.

“Let us talk a little,” said Cyrano as they walked along. “Who is this Manuel?”

“A good comrade . . . like me.”

“Is he,” asked the poet, with a sort of anxiety, “like you . . . does he at times yield to temptation? Does he make a business of robbing people on the roads?”

“Oh, never!” replied the bandit with genuine conviction. “He has a generous and loyal nature.”

Cyrano breathed a sigh of relief.

“What is his origin?” he asked again.

“A child of chance like us all.”

“But he is not without education; how was he reared?”

“Rather by an adventure. Once when my father’s tribe was still intact,—for my father was a chief of our race,—we one day gave shelter to a poor devil of an Italian doctor, who had been obliged to leave his country, on account of a duel . . . unfortunate man . . . you understand?”

“Perfectly. Continue.”

“The doctor was a great scholar. He took an interest in Manuel, and finding him apt, he wished to have him for his pupil, in order to charm away the *ennui* of his exile. Manuel took to it marvelously, and that is why he makes rhymes to please the ladies.”

“What has become of his professor?”

“He died.”

“A natural death?”

“Yes, of indigestion. The food man became a great gormand in his old age.”

“ May God rest his soul!—Let us return to Manuel ; you told me that he was a child of chance.”

“ Yes.”

“ Of your race ? ”

“ I believe so. . . . ”

Cyrano grasped Ben-Joël's wrist, and looking at him with disturbing persistence, he asked :

“ Are you sure of it ? ”

“ Why that question ? ” returned the Bohemian, whose countenance betrayed indecision.

“ Because I have other ideas of Manuel's origin ! ”

“ What are they ? ”

“ I believe he is a stolen child ! ”

“ Stolen ! ” cried Ben-Joël, turning pale in spite of himself.

“ Yes, stolen, not by you, you are too young, but by your kindred, by your father, perhaps.”

“ Ah, good lord,” replied Ben-Joël in his natural voice, “ why should they have stolen him ? ”

“ To do with him as your like does ! To use him as a bait for the charity of passers-by, to rear him to theft and to crime, perhaps to obtain a ransom later on from his family ! How do I know ! There is no lack of reasons.”

“ Undeceive yourself, my lord, Manuel is of our blood.”

“ Do not swear to that ; for perhaps I will force you to deny it. Moreover, before inquiring any further, I wish to question Manuel.”

As they had by that time reached the House of Cyclops, Cyrano concluded :

“ Guide me.”

## VIII.

THE two men entered.

On coming into the low hall of the house, Cyrano saw that he was in a sort of miserable inn, where the old woman, whom we have already seen, for a small sum, dispensed hospitality nightly to the strollers on the crossroads. This room was always lighted by one single iron lamp hung from the ceiling. Properly speaking, the unclean dormitory was a cellar, for the walls without openings were of leaky stone and the floor of earth.

In one corner a wooden stairway, narrow and slimy, wound toward the upper story, rented to Ben-Joël and his companions, who were the only permanent guests in that strange dwelling. About the centre of the staircase-way was a small cabin containing a bed, and serving as a retreat for the mistress of the house, who lived there, alone, taciturn and sullen, as a toad in a hole in a rock.

Ben-Joël's apartments were divided into two parts. One was a room, lighted by the large leaded window,—the eye of Cyclops,—and belonging to Zilla. It was a sort of alchemist's study, filled with retorts, with vases of all sorts and shapes, with a stove at the end, a bed covered with gaudy materials in one corner, some musical instruments and a large vase full of flowers on a small stand of carved oak. One could not feel that poverty lurked there; but one would suspect the existence of a life made up of problems and mystery.

It showed a woman's taste; and that woman the priestess of a mysterious worship; jewels and unintelligible things, perfumes and poisons, knots of ribbon and steel stiletos were to be seen in singular disorder; an atmosphere at once irritating and soothing was inhaled there, an atmosphere which confused the brain as well as the mind.

The other part was occupied by Ben-Joël and Manuel. It was a common attic, opening on the roof by means of a dormer-window.

It was into Zilla's room, separated from his by a narrow passage, that Ben-Joël ushered Savinien.

Not without some surprise did Cyrano examine the interior, and scorning to renew the conversation commenced with Ben-Joël, he seated himself to await the extemporizer's return. Eleven o'clock struck in the distance. Soon after Manuel appeared. On finding Cyrano installed in his friend's apartments, he was surprised, and his astonishment did not escape the gentleman.

"Does my presence amaze you?" he asked, genially.

"Undoubtedly, sir, I did not know that Ben-Joël had business with you."

"It is not with Ben-Joël that I have business, but with yourself."

"With me?"

"Precisely. We have serious matters to talk over."

At those words, Cyrano's face assumed the quasi-solemn expression we saw upon it the night he visited Jacques Longuépée, the curé of Saint-Sernin. Ben-Joël, standing at the window, looked at the gentleman with an air impatiently attentive.

Cyrano pointed to the door:

“Leave us,” said he.

The Bohemian bowed, slowly crossed the room, and went out.

“Very well,” he said, once only, “search, inquire all you like, it is I on whom you have to depend, and, by the devil, I will not give you what you will want without making you pay for your blows. Gold or blood, I must have compensation, and I *will* have it.”

When Ben-Joël had disappeared, Savinien carefully closed the door, pushed a chair near the window, that is to say as far as possible from the entrance, and turning toward Manuel, said :

“Take a seat.”

The young man obeyed, subdued by his interlocutor’s grave air. The gentleman took his seat opposite him.

“I am here in your interest,” he commenced,—“it is essential to establish that fact above all else. Now, are you disposed to answer me frankly?”

“That depends.”

“You must say simply yes or no,” returned Cyrano, with a shade of impatience.

Manuel looked at him for an instant, and said :

“Well, yes.”

“Very good. Let us proceed with method; you love Mlle. Gilberte de Faventines?”

“Sir!” stammered Manuel, attempting to rise.

“You love her,” insisted Cyrano, overruling him with a firm glance. “Your improvisation of yesterday was no idle fancy. Your eyes, your attitude were more eloquent than your verses; Count Roland had cause to be jealous.”

Manuel raised his head with a haughty air.



"What if it should be so?" inquired the young man, as if surprised that any one should dare to descend thus into his heart's mystery.

"Well and good, I admit the fact," tranquilly resumed Cyrano, "but I admit also that in order to have dared to raise your eyes so high, you must have had a mental reservation."

"No! . . . I love, I have confessed that love, it was my sole ambition."

"Then, my dear fellow, you are mad!"

"Why? I pay homage to a woman whose grace and beauty have charmed me. It is a personal sentiment. What can it matter to her, since she does not love me?"

"I supposed something else."

"What?"

"I supposed that, not daring to hope to see Mlle. Gilberte descend to you, you had devised some means of raising yourself to her level."

"I do not wish to deceive any one; it is not so."

"Truly?"

"I affirm it, what is more, I swear it."

"Then," emphasized Cyrano with a certain amount of disappointment, "you are only a Bohemian, a beggar, somewhat bolder than the rest, that is all?"

"Nothing more," confessed Manuel, modestly.

"Are you positive of this?"

"Why . . . I think so," murmured Manuel, whom his interlocutor's tone troubled in spite of himself.

Cyrano drew his chair nearer the Bohemian's.

"Relate to me your life," he said; "I believe I have told you that you are speaking to a friend."

Manuel smiled.

“My God!” he commenced, lightly, “my life is similar to that of my brother’s: it is an interminable voyage through the unknown, alternative poverty and opulence, a bed upon the ground, rainy days, sunny days, dry bread for a month, banquets for a week, and above all carelessness, which doubles good-fortune and makes one accept misfortune gaily.”

“All that is vague: let us go further.”

“As you like.”

“Do you know nothing of your past?”

“Very little.”

“That little may have its value. Tell it to me.”

“To be candid, I do not believe I am of Ben-Joël’s blood.”

Cyrano heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

“What makes you think so?”

“My memories.”

“You see, you *do* remember something.”

“Of what avail is it? If, by chance, I prove to be a found child, who will restore me to my family?”

“Certain people,” said the gentleman, sententiously, “know how to find a needle in a haystack; I pretend to be of that number.”

Manuel rose with a bound; his eyes sparkled, his breast heaved, his heart throbbed.

“You?” he cried, “what do you know?”

“Continue!” commanded Savinien, coldly.

“Well! what do you want to hear?”

“Your reminiscences,—the most insignificant to you may be the most important to me.”

The extemporizer reflected for a moment, then he went on:

"That which is the most distinctly impressed upon my mind, is the home of Ben-Joël's father: I was there, with his son, my present companion, his sister Zilla, a very little girl, and another child who died a few years after."

"Ah! ah! what was that child's name?"

"Old Joël called him Samy; I, I do not know why, always called him Simon."

Cyrano the Bold, he who would not pale before twenty sword-blades, turned pale and started at that name. His companion watched him with anxious curiosity. The gentleman noticed that watchfulness, and with the composure he knew how to command at will, he asked:

"Simon? Did you know no other persons before those Bohemians and that child?"

"I can confusedly remember in the past the faces of old men and of women, other children larger than myself, one especially . . . thin . . . bold of manner . . . proud of speech. . . ."

"Who was he?"

"Wait"—and Manuel fell into a reverie,—“he was almost always with me, and often . . . often, he beat me.”

“One always remembers people who beat one,” observed Cyrano, with a dogmatic air. “The stick is a powerful aid to the memory.”

“He beat me, but I loved him dearly,” corrected Mannel. “His name? . . . Yes, I will remember his name, too.”

“It was? . . .” asked Cyrano, who rose impatiently.

Had Manuel at that moment glanced at his cross-

questioner, he would have seen his heart stir the silk of his doublet and enormous beads of perspiration trickle down his forehead. But his mind was busy elsewhere. He no longer thought of him who was speaking to him, he thought only of himself, of what he was, of what he might be, and fantastic images rose before his dazzled eyes.

“Speak!” thundered Cyrano, seizing his hand and shaking it to arouse him from that torpor.

“I am hunting that name,” said the Bohemian. “Oh! I feel it on my lips, it seems to me that it flies away each time that I try to pronounce it.”

“Compose yourself.”

“Here it is!” cried Manuel, finally.

“At last!”

“That child whom I loved, the companion of my early years, I called . . . yes . . . it is that. . . .”

“You called him?”

“Savinien; yes, Savinien!” he repeated, slowly, as if to convince himself that the syllables which fell upon his ear were really those with which he was formerly familiar.

Cyrano rose again, this time not grave, but triumphant, transfigured. A smile was on his lips, his voice was at once joyous and tender.

“Savinien,” he explained, pressing his young friend’s fingers, “that knave of a Savinien, that wicked rascal who beat his young pupil with a switch, when he missed his thrusts and parries in fencing, Savinien, who has grown, who has aged, but who has not forgotten!”

“Do you know him?”

"Do I know him? He still calls himself Savinien, but he has added to it Cyrano de Bergerac.—Ah! old Lembrat will turn in his grave.—Embrace me, my child, embrace me!"

Cyrano opened his arms.

"Savinien! is it you!" stammered Manuel, replying to the noble's cordial embrace.

Then he asked with an anxiety easy to comprehend:

"Who am I?"

"You are no longer Manuel: down with the Bohemian name! Your name is Ludovic de Lembrat; you are Count Roland's brother."

Manuel closed his eyes, as if stunned by a blow from a club. Such a revelation seemed to him a sport of Fate, a cruel irony, which would soon plunge him again into shadow. With pitiful hesitation he asked:

"You are not deceiving me? You are not playing upon my credulity?"

"First of all," said Cyrano, "do me the kindness to address me on familiar terms,—as formerly. Then, know that I have never deceived any one."

Manuel's doubts were overcome.

"Ah! it is happiness!" he confessed aloud, replying to a secret hope. "But how did you think of it? . . ."

"Eh?" asked Cyrano.

"How did you think," (he used the familiar "thou,") corrected Manuel,—shaking the hand of the valiant man, who smiled on him, "of finding Ludovic under the rage of the adventurer, Manuel?"

"That was very simple,—I looked at you."

"I do not understand."

"You will, however. Do you recognize this?"

Savinien drew from his pocket a case and, opening it, disclosed to view the portrait of a young man dressed in an elegant hunting suit.

“My portrait!” exclaimed Manuel, in amazement.

“It is not your portrait, but your father’s at the age of twenty, at your age. Do you now see how I recognized you at first sight? Your eyes, your smile, your gait, even the sound of your voice, cried to me: ‘Old Lembrat is revived in his son!’ That is why I had you followed and why I desired to question you; great as may be a resemblance, it might be a freak of nature. You have spoken, now; you have called me by name; I no longer doubt!”

“Ah, Savinien,” exclaimed the young man in a burst of grateful affection, “what do I not owe to you? I can love now, can I not?”

“Selfish boy!” smiled the gentleman, “we will see; the most urgent matter is to have your brother acknowledge you. And for that, other proofs than you and my word, are necessary.”

“Proofs?” repeated Manuel, whom these words shilled.

“Undoubtedly. I cannot seek out the Count and say to him simply: Here is your brother.”

A bitter smile curled Cyrano’s lips. He knew Roland de Lembrat well; he knew in advance what feeling he would arouse in him.

“He would not believe me,” he explained, “were I simply to say that to him, for the absent are always wrong, especially when those absent are brothers, and when they come back, after a lapse of fifteen years, armed with their rights, to reclaim their place. The laws of men themselves would be with him against us,

in spite of what I could affirm . . . in spite of what I know," he concluded, almost in a whisper.

"If proofs are required," said Manuel, suddenly, "we will have them!"

"How?"

"Ben-Joël's father was the chief of a large band, now scattered, and as such, the trustee of a book in which for years all the important events occurring in the tribe were inscribed."

"Well?"

"That book must contain the record of my entrance and of Simon's into Ben-Joël's family."

"With what object would they have kept a record of that fact, the result of a criminal action?"

"I do not know. Perhaps in view of a claim becoming the source of a benefit to the tribe; perhaps, more simply, to avoid in the future the confusion of a man of alien blood with the sons of the pure Egyptian race."

"Bah! those people do not care about their genealogy."

"You are mistaken; old Joël was perfectly familiar with the history of all the families of his tribe. He carefully recorded the births and the marriages, and could trace the past of his race farther perhaps than the noblest houses of France."

"Pass by that, but you! your origin?"

"Many times," related Manuel, when we were wandering through France, have I seen sold or stolen children brought to the camp. When one was brought, he was presented to old Joël, who asked his name, wrote it in his book and said:

"Henceforth you are of our band."

"He then gave him another name, which he wrote

after the first, and the child went away, mingled with those of the tribe, but was recognizable under all circumstances; it is thus that Simon was called Samy, it was thus that I received my name of Manuel. What I have seen done for others, they did for me."

"Probably. Where is the book?"

"In Ben-Joël's hands."

"In that case, we shall know all."

Cyrano opened the door precipitately enough to see Ben-Joël rush hastily into his room. The Bohemian had listened to the conversation just carried on, and if he had not heard all, he had at least guessed all.

The nobleman seized him by his ear and said in a tone of menace:

"Spy, you were listening?"

"My lord!"

"Come along."

He dragged him into Zilla's chamber.

"Answer, now. What did you overhear?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

"Do not lie. It matters little to me, just now, that you should not know what has passed; I have no longer a secret to keep from you; therefore, if your ears have served you well, confess it; it will avoid explanations for me."

Ben-Joël stammered humbly:

"Excuse me, I was bored all alone in my room, and, my faith! . . ."

"You made yourself the third in our conversation?"

"To simplify matters, as you said, I confess it."

"Then you know of Manuel's new fate?"

"And I am rejoiced at it, my lord; one is always pleased to see a good comrade prosper."



"Especially, since he will be in a position to do you some good, eh?"

"You can count on that," interpolated Manuel. "For fifteen years I have been your guest; the men whom I could blame for my misfortune are dead; Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat will not lose sight of those with whom Manuel has shared his poverty."

"Let us make more haste," interrupted Cyrano; "I am addressing Ben-Joël."

"I am listening, my lord."

"What do you know of Manuel? Does the book of which he spoke contain anything of importance to him?"

"Yes, his name and information regarding the circumstances under which he was received."

"You should say stolen."

"One does not confess those things."

"Zounds! Give me the date of the kidnapping?"

"October 25th, 1633."

"The place?"

"Garrigues, near Fougères."

"Does the book contain other details?"

"It tells of the death of Samy, the child who came to us at the same time as Manuel."

"Where is that book?"

"There!"

Ben-Joël extended his hand, pointing to a corner of the room in which was an oaken chest with heavy iron-work.

"Give it to me," said Cyrano.

The Bohemian, flinging aside his air of humility, drew himself up like a man proud of his strength, and replied in a calm, confident manner:

“What for, my lord?”

“That I may use it to confirm Manuel’s identity, of course.”

Ben-Joël and Cyrano looked at each other an instant; the latter seemed to read some evil intention in the gypsy’s eyes, for he knit his brows and made a gesture of impatience.

“To confirm Manuel’s identity,” replied Ben-Joël, in the same slow and firm voice, “my evidence is sufficient for the moment.”

“Will you obey?” rebuked Cyrano, who was commencing to twirl the end of his moustache furiously, surprised himself at his patience.

Ben-Joël’s composure increased, owing to Cyrano’s irritation. The man had suddenly conceived a plan by the execution of which his hatred of Savinien, his ambition and his cupidity would later on be satisfied.

The blows received on the road to Fougerolles still caused his shoulders to smart, and he smiled inwardly at the thought that he held in his power by one of the interests most dear to him, the man he detested.

“If it be necessary to produce that book in court,” he added, “I will produce it myself; I do not *wish*, (he emphasized that word,) I do not *wish* to have it taken from me.”

“Ah!” sneered Cyrano, taking a step toward him, “you set great value on that relic, do you, master Joël?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Indeed.”

“As a relic first of all.”

“And then, if you please?”

“As a guarantee!”

"I understand you, knave. You will only give up your proof for money!"

"Ha, my lord, that proof gives me a value which I should lose by giving it up."

"Very well! if it become necessary, the law will know how to open your hands."

At that threat, Manuel, who had not cared to join in the discussion, approached the Bohemian and said to him:

"Do you mistrust me, Ben-Joël; have I given you the right to do so?"

"I mistrust fortune," replied the adventurer, prudently.

Cyrano took Manuel's arm and turned toward the door.

"Come," said he, "I will take you home with me, we can talk better there, and this evening, to-morrow at the latest, you will meet your brother and resume your name. We shall meet soon, Ben-Joël."

"When it pleases you, sir. I bear you no ill-will, Manuel."

When young Viscount de Lembrat and Cyrano left the House of Cyclops, Ben-Joël wore a silent smile, which died away in a sudden contraction of his thin lips. That prudent, spiteful and voracious lynx had just had a glimpse of the future. Zilla's step, stealing softly over the corridor-boards, snatched him from his dark dreams.

"Come hither, my girl," he cried, "great news!"

"What is it?" asked Zilla, removing her long brown cloak.

"It is, my dear, that, without suspecting it, we have for fifteen years sheltered a great lord."

The fortune-teller turned pale, and her eyes, as dark as night, glowed.

"A great lord?" she repeated, fearing to hear more, and still eager to question.

"Undoubtedly. Who is missing here?"

"Manuel!"

"Yes, Manuel, or rather," said the bandit, making a low bow to an invisible being, "Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat, lord of Fongerolles."

"The proofs?" cried Zilla, with fierce authority.

"I have affirmed them."

"Yes!"

Her eyes shot fire. Ben-Joël took no heed of that fact.

"Do you want to know how it happened, my dear? Listen!"

In a few words he told her the facts.

Zilla received the confidence in silence, and the remainder of the day she remained seated in the same spot, her head in her hands, thinking. Toward evening Ben-Joël, who had gone out, found her as he had left her.

"Are you asleep, Zilla?" he asked.

Without raising her pale brow, she replied:

"No."

"It is supper-time, my girl; are you coming?"

"Thank you."

"Are you not hungry?"

"No!"

"Please yourself!"

Ben-Joël began to eat; then, after a brief silence, he asked:

"Come, Zilla, what ails you?"

"Nothing!"

"Yes! there is something. Is it Manuel's departure that has taken your appetite? Is it true, then, that you love him, sly jade?"

"What is it to you?"

"Who knows? I only asked to make you happy."

Zilla rose, and, advancing toward her brother, and flashing her dark eyes upon him, she asked:

"Why did you let him go?"

"Is he not free?"

"Why did you inspire him with that ambitious thought?"

"You are mad! I have said nothing to him."

"Is it true that he is a gentleman?"

"It must be believed," mocked Ben-Joël; "the proofs seem conclusive to me."

"They are accursed!"

"Why, if you please?"

"Because," cried Zilla, overcome finally by her anguish, "because Manuel is lost to me, because I love him, do you hear?"

"You confess it, then?"

"Yes," she returned, vehemently, "I curse the happiness that has come to him and has killed mine. Will Manuel remember even our name in a week?"

"Oh! you may rest assured he will remember it."

Zilla did not comprehend the meaning of those words.

"If some one," she insinuated, leaning toward her brother, surprised at that new accent, "if some one should remove the proofs which give to Manuel the name of Lembrat, if, to aid in that result some one

were to offer you a fortune, tell me, Ben-Joël, what would you do?"

The bandit winked his eye diabolically.

"You are not so bad, my darling," he smiled; "however, let me give you some advice."

"What is it?"

"Keep still and . . . wait."

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IX.

ON the evening of that same day, there was a large and brilliant gathering in the Marquis de Faventines' *salon*.

Gilberte, out of the range of the lights, was receiving Roland's attentions with an absent air; the Marchioness, surrounded by several old gentlemen and two or three ladies, whose beauty had been at its height at the time of the youth of the late King Louis XIII., was talking softly, while M. de Faventines, seated at a table between two men with grave faces, was listening patiently to the remarks of a personage dressed in black, standing before him.

That personage, who deserves special mention, was M. Jean de Lamothe, grand provost of Paris. With his long, withered and sallow face, his small eyes as bright as coals beneath their lids devoid of lashes, his thin, mocking lips, his forehead seamed with lines of obstinacy, Jean de Lamothe had nothing prepossessing in his favor. He was not however a bad man; addicted to the sciences, he employed in all questions relative to his studies a severity and at times an injustice from which he fortunately knew how to free himself for the accomplishment of the duties of his office. His manner was solemn, his speech dogmatic, and although he did not defend good causes, as we shall see, at least he defended them with a warlike conviction.

A large sheet of vellum was placed on the table

between him and his three auditors. On that sheet, Jean de Lamothe had drawn some astronomical figures, and with his finger pointing to his work, his eye flashing fire, he continued his demonstration without remarking the indifference of his listeners. For the moment he had taken as his mark, Cyrano de Bergerac, author of theories which seemed to him the most subversive in the world, and that subject excited him greatly, for, without remarking it his voice cleared the middle register to assume a sharp, shrill tone.

“Yes, sirs,” he cried, having downed his imaginary contradictor beneath a supreme argument—for Cyrano was not there—“yes, the man who denies that deserves to be burned alive on Place de Grève.”

“Ah!” said the Marquis, good-naturedly, “do you treat our friend Cyrano thus? What has he done to you?”

“What has he done? He is a damned soul, an accomplice of Satan, Marquis.”

“I should sooner have taken him for a madman.”

“A dangerous madman,” affirmed the grand-provost.

Then, with indignation free from dissimulation, he said:

“Did he not write that the moon is inhabited?”

“What heresy!” said the Marquis, feigning a smile.

“And that the earth revolves!”

“What blasphemy!”

“That is to say,” thundered the enraged *savant*, “that social order is destroyed, that the world is coming to an end.—Bergerac is not a man, he is the anti-Christ.”

“Do you not go a little too far? Bergerac is a friend of this family, M. de Lamothe.”



"Do you receive him?"

"Yes, indeed, and you would know it better were you not so chary of your visits."

"Science is a tyrannical witness," said the provost, in extenuation.

"I assure you, my dear friend," continued the Marquis, "that Bergerac improves on acquaintance, although he maintains that the moon is inhabited and that the earth revolves."

"But that is just what irritates me! It does not revolve, and I will demonstrate it to you once more."

The Marquis bowed his head. He had not expected that new blow; his eyes advised patience to his two acolytes, who were dozing in their armchairs, and Jean de Lamothe's long arm was again stretched over the celestial chart spread before him.

"Follow me well," said he. "This small circle is the moon, that other the earth, and I . . . I represent the sun."

"That is modest of you," murmured M. de Faventines, between two discreet yawns.

Those premises made, the *savant* resumed his dissertation.

Whilst he lost himself in the development of his thesis, the door opened softly, and Cyrano de Bergerac appeared. A sign from the Marquis stealthily showed him the orator, and, the young man, after greeting Gilberte and her mother, took Roland's arm and advanced to the table which the provost for the moment had set up for a tribune.

Jean de Lamothe did not know that the enemy was standing motionless behind him.

"Therefore, dear Marquis," he concluded, "Cyrano

de Bergerac is an impostor, and the earth does not revolve, because it is flat, as has been established by the illustrious Jean Grangier."

"It does revolve," then interposed Cyrano, irreverently, "and there is not on its vast surface a worse platitude than the argument you cite."

The provost leaped aside, as if he had heard the trump of judgment sounding in his ear.

"Ah! it is you, sir," said he, when his agitation was controlled, "it is you who contradict me?"

"It is I," replied the poet, laughing, "and ready to give you an answer, if you please, and if these ladies will permit."

Jean de Lamothe knit his brow. At heart he was delighted. He had his adversary fast; he was about to have the pleasure of confounding, of crushing, of annihilating him. A circle was formed around the two polemist.

The contest promised to be interesting.

"So, sir," advanced the provost, who proudly took his post in front of Cyrano and seemed to increase in height, "you still sustain that utopia? You are trifling with us, sir, and with those who read your writings. What foundation have you for imagining that the sun does not move when we can see it? And what proof that the earth revolves with such rapidity, when we can feel it stationary beneath our feet?"

Cyrano did not heed the shrug of the shoulders full of scornful pity with which the *sarant* accompanied his apostrophe, and replied with a smile:

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, provost, the thing is very simple, and I will explain it to you by an example within the reach of all minds."

Jean de Lamothe made a movement as if about to speak.

"Do not trouble yourself," Savinien hastened to add. "It is common to believe that the sun is in the centre of our sphere, since all the bodies in Nature have need of that radical fire."

"Absurd proposition," grumbled the provost.

"Therefore," resumed the poet, "the sun is in the heart of the world, to nourish and to vivify it, just as the core is in the centre of the apple, the stone in the fruit, the germ under the protection of the numerous layers of the onion. The universe is that apple, that fruit, that onion, and the sun, that germ around which all gravitates."

A slight sneer was the provost's sole reply.

"Do you really think," persisted Cyrano, "that that large centre turns around our earth to warm and to light it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, sir, if you think that, it is almost the same as if you thought, on seeing a lark broiled, that they turned the fire around the spit in order to cook it."

And, satisfied with his joke, the nobleman turned quickly on his heel, troubling himself no longer about his opposer.

"I yield the precedence to you," said the provost, whose arguments did not assume that light form; "your infernal wit will cause your death on a stake."

"In that case, provost, rest assured, you are certain of expiring in your bed."

That insolence glued the provost to the spot. When he looked for Cyrano in order to answer him, the lat-

ter was at the other end of the *salon*, seated with Roland, near Gilberte.

No allusion to the scene of the preceding day had yet been made by Count de Lembrat, in the presence of his *fiancée*. But when Cyrano formed the third in the conversation Roland did not fear to touch on the exciting subject. Cyrano's preoccupation had not escaped him, and he had seen Sulpice Castillan go in pursuit of the three Bohemians.

"Have you seen your young secretary?" he asked of Cyrano.

"Why that question?"

"Because Master Sulpice seemed to me greatly bewitched by the beautiful eyes of the sybil who told us such fine things yesterday, and he followed her with such eagerness that he may have gone a long distance."

"Which proves that my excellent Castillan has taste. The beautiful Bohemian is worth notice. However, rest easy, my secretary has returned."

The Count, desirous of learning the key-note of the problem he had set himself to solve, was about to venture another question when Savinien prevented him.

"On learning yesterday of your approaching marriage, my dear Roland," said he, "and on rejoicing with you, a sad thought crossed my mind."

"What was it?"

"I thought of your brother, Roland."

The Count started, Gilberte listened attentively.

"A brother!" she said; "the Count has never spoken to us of him!"

"It was," ventured Cyrano, somewhat ironically, "because he feared to make you sad by a painful revelation."

"Why," stammered Roland, "stir up those memories, why evoke that sorrowful story, which, alas! has no end?"

Cyrano smiled vaguely and murmured:

"Perhaps it has."

An expression of anxiety was depicted on Count de Lembrat's features.

"Tell us that story, M. de Cyrano," besought Gilberte, "I beg of you."

"It is very simple:

"Ludovic, Roland's brother, was five years old when I was thirteen, and old Count de Lembrat, by whom I was raised, often entrusted the child to me: I taught him to mount a horse, to fence, everything that I then knew passably. One day when I was absent from Fougerolles, Ludovic went a short distance from the castle with the gardener's son, named Simon Vidal, a boy of his age. When night came, the search for the two children was vainly made. Had they fallen into the Dordogne, while looking for nests under the willows? Had they been stolen by a band of gypsies? No one could say. Count de Lembrat died recommending Roland to my care and bidding me remember Ludovic, whom I had sworn to find for him if he was still alive."

"It is more than fifteen years since Ludovic disappeared," interposed the Count; "he is no doubt dead."

"Your brother would now have attained the age when a man reasons and makes researches; who knows if he will not find you some day, since you have not had a chance to find him?"

"Oh, I wish it with all my heart," exclaimed Gilberte.

Cyrano's aim can be guessed. Before revealing to Roland this brother's existence, he was studying the man's heart; before putting him to the test of friendship, he desired to know on what sort of a ground he would have to work.

Roland's countenance was evidently displeased. The possibility of his brother's return awoke within him secret revolt; he instinctively felt himself threatened.

"The recognition," resumed Cyrano, replying to Gilberte's exclamation, "would cost Roland one-half of his fortune; but I fancy he would not regret it."

The Count felt the thrust, and said coldly:

"If my brother returns, I will receive him with open arms; I will do for him what I should, but I shall not forget that I am the eldest of the Lembrats!"

"I judged aright," thought Cyrano; "there will be a struggle."

Then gently he returned:

"The eldest of the Lembrats, that is true, but. . . ."

"But . . . ?"

"That would not exempt you from giving your brother a reckoning."

"The common law is on my side, I think."

Roland's character was beginning to reveal itself in its real light.

"The common law is respectable, undoubtedly," said Cyrano, "nevertheless it gives way before certain considerations."

"What are they?"

"The wish of the father of the family."

"In that case, there would be necessary. . . ."

"What?"

"A will!"

"Precisely, my dear friend, and that is what I was coming to! That will. . . ."

"Well?"

"Exists!"

"My father's?"

"Your father's!"

"You are mistaken, Cyrano."

"No, I am not; I have told you nothing about it, because it was useless to speak to you of it as long as you had no engagements to bind you; but you are now about to wed, it is only right that your new family should not be ignorant of your past debts nor of your future obligations."

"My father was more jealous than any other person of the lustre of his name; if he has done what you say, he could not have ousted me without derogating from his principles."

"He loved his sons equally; he desired that one should share fortune and honors equally with the other."

"You must be familiar with the terms of that will, to know so much about it?"

"I am."

Roland bit his lips.

"Where has my father left it?" he asked, trembling.

"In my hands!"

The Count said an exclamation.

"Count," said Gilberte, chilled by her *fiancé's* manner, "do you regret your father's choice?"

"God forbid! my father loved Savinien and knew

him to be strong and faithful; I have now but one wish: that my brother may return! Even in giving him one-half of my fortune, I shall still be rich enough to give you the life of happiness which you have a right to expect."

"Well said, Roland," said Cyrano, who rose to take leave.

The Count detained him, and, drawing him somewhat aside, said in a low voice:

"One word, my dear friend."

"Well!"

"Where is my father's will?"

"Why?"

"I am simply curious! And then, could we not obtain the necessary dispensation to open the document?"

"Take care, Roland, you doubt my word!"

"No."

"There is in your father's will something else besides the question of money."

"What?"

"A terrible confession!"

"Terrible! for whom?"

"For you!"

"For me?"

"Yes, believe me, Roland; for the sake of your own peace of mind, let your father's secret rest."

"But," persisted the Count, vexed and at the same time troubled by those confidences behind which he felt a vague threat, "if you should die, what would become of that testament?"

"Do not worry yourself about that difficulty; I have provided for it."



And as Roland looked at him with indecision, Cyrano concluded, extending his hand to him :

“ My dear Count, it is not without a purpose that I have just told you all these things. You are nearing a solemn moment, and, before putting you in the presence of facts, I desired to know what I could hope or fear from your heart ; my opinion is formed now.”

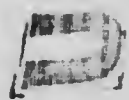
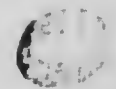
“ What have you still to tell me ? ”

“ You shall know to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow ? ”

“ At my house ; can I count on your visit ? ”

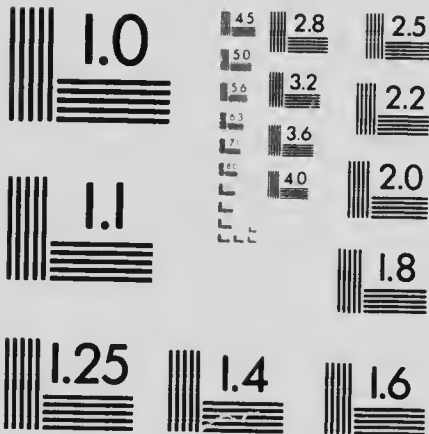
“ I promise you. At ten o'clock I shall knock at your door.”





# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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## X.

SULPICE CASTILLAN was writing in Cyrano's room, seated at a table near the open window, which admitted the fresh air and the bright morning light. In his very best handwriting, the secretary was recopying an act from the tragedy of *Agrippine*, which caused its author, Cyrano, so much worry.

Master Castillan was not happy, for he was singing. Such was the good youth's nature. When satisfaction filled his soul, Castillan enjoyed his happiness in silence; on the other hand, his ill-humor was expressed in songs and factiousness. Did he wish to divert himself or to set fate at defiance? That was a problem to be solved. He was never so sad as when he was happy, and never so gay as when he was miserable.

On this especial morning, whether his pen was bad, or whether unpleasant dreams had disturbed his sleep, Castillan began for the third time the couplet, the production of his master's brain,—

“ L'on ne verra plus dans Paris  
Tant de plumes ni de moustaches  
De duellistes aguerris,  
L'on n'en verra plus dans Paris!  
Consolez-vous, jaloux maris,  
Adieu, raffinés et vrvaches!  
L'on ne verra plus dans Paris  
Tant de plumes ni de moustaches; ”

The couplet finished, Sulpice was about to criticise it for the eleventh time, when a serving-woman, ro-

bust, fleshy, buxom, and walking with the step of a cavalier, entered. Suzanne, so she styled herself, was a typical native of Perigord, aged about forty, whom Cyrano had taken into his service in a day of epulence. She was attached to him, and although the poet, after the second month of her service, had forgotten to pay her her wages, she did not want to leave him. She was, too, almost the mistress of the house, where her freedom of speech surprised no one.

She planted herself in front of Castillan and apostrophized him unceremoniously :

“He sings, the careless fellow! Say, are you paid to sing?”

“I am singing because I am annoyed, Suzanne.”

“The fine fellow! Look at him! Why are you annoyed?”

“Because the weather is beautiful, because I should like to go out, and because M. de Bergerac is late in coming to give me permission.”

“Indeed, where is our master?”

“He has not fought since day before yesterday, and M. de Vangis came in search of him at daybreak to have him serve as his second.”

“Good! He will return to us with a gash. Oh! what a furious fighter your patron is, Castillan!”

“What would you have? It is life to that man! When he has not a duel two or three times in a week, he thinks the world is going awry.”

Notwith'standing Suzanne's predictions, Cyrano returned safe and sound. It was nine o'clock, and Roland de Lembrat would not be late.

At the sight of her master, Suzanne hastily left the room, and Cyrano seated himself beside Castillan.

"Have you finished?" he asked the secretary, who, at the thought of his speedy release, suddenly assumed a morose air.

"Yes."

"Very well; you can go out until this evening: I shall not need you. Ah! wait, I must dictate a letter to you."

"To whom?"

"To that rascally Montfleury."

"The actor at Hôtel de Bourgogne?"

"Yes."

"What has he done again?"

"He has taken it upon himself to interdict my pieces and to prevent his comrades from playing them."

Sulpice began to whistle. His ill-humor was returning. He submitted, however, and taking his pen, said:

"I am ready."

Cyrano began to pace the floor with lengthy strides, and as he walked, he dictated the following letter which is not without interest as a trait of our hero's character, and as an example of his strange turn of mind:

"Coarse man, I can assure that if blows could be sent in writing, you would read my letter with your shoulders.

"Do you think that because you were not challenged within twenty-four hours, that I wish to leave your death to the executioner? No! In the meanwhile, know, knave, that I interdict you for a month, and rest assured that if you forget my prohibition and dare to appear on the stage, I will prevent you from

being numbered among living things and will crush you in such a manner that a flea, licking the ground, would not be able to distinguish you from the pavement. . . .”

When that triumphant epistle was finished, he who was called Captain Satan added to it his heroic signature and breathed a sigh of satisfaction. The battle was well advertised. Cyrano was contented with it.

“Go, my boy,” he bade Castellan, “take the letter yourself, and if the rogue is not satisfied, tell him I will go in search of his ears to-night; go.”

Castellan hastened to obey. On the staircase he met Count Roland de Lembrat, who had come faithful to the engagement made the day before.

Savinien had prepared his way too thoroughly and knew his visitor's disposition too well, not to proceed straight to his object. Determined to grasp the situation promptly, he scarcely gave Roland time to sit down, when he asked gaily:

“Do you know why I asked you to come?”

“I would be obliged would you tell me, for your words of yesterday contained a mystery I should like to see cleared up.”

“Very well! I will not try your patience long; you are a man, and I think joy, great as it might be, would not kill you.”

That was said in an ironical tone, which did not escape Roland.

“What do you intend to do?” he interrupted.

“I have a surprise for you.”

“What is it?”

“A great surprise. Do you remember what you said to me yesterday before Mademoiselle Gilberte?”

“What did I say to you?”

“This: ‘If my brother should return, I would receive him with open arms!’”

Roland commenced to understand. His flesh was wet with perspiration.

“That is quite natural,” said he, with an effort.

“Well, my friend,” cried Cyrano, raising the *portière* of an adjoining room, “open your arms, your brother has returned: here he is!”

That scene prepared by Cyrano, foreseen perhaps by Roland, caused his strength to give way, and he clung convulsively to his cross-examiner’s arm.

For a second he could not see, he could not hear. But when, in the brother presented to him, who, trembling, beside himself with joy and hope, extended his arms to him, he recognized the Bohemian of the day before, the audacious adventurer who had been his rival, the man he had ignominiously chased out of the garden, a stifled cry escaped the Count’s breast, and he recoiled in order to escape the odious sight.

“It is he! He!” he repeated, instinctively clinching his fists.

“He!” said Cyrano. “Look at him: has he not your father’s features?”

Whilst Roland cast a troubled and uncertain glance upon his brother, Manuel approached softly, and bending his knee before the Count, said:

“My brother, two days since, Providence placed us face to face, and nothing told us that the same blood flowed in our veins. I offended you doubly then: I ask your pardon for it; you are the eldest of the Lembrats, henceforth you will find me faithful to the devotion, to the love and to the respect which I owe



to the head of my family; my life has been obscure and miserable, my honor, however, is intact; give me your hand, my brother, I am worthy to press it."

Roland made a desperate effort to appear calm, and, as if regretfully, he gave Manuel his hand, saying:

"Rise, sir. I cannot yet give vent to my delight; first there must be light cast upon your case. Before giving you the title of brother which you claim, I require proofs, conclusive proofs."

"Zounds, my dear Roland," cried Cyrano, sharply, "you are not very complimentary to my truthfulness, it seems to me; do you think I am presenting a fraudulent brother to you? At any rate, you shall have the proof or the testimony you require."

And turning to Manuel, he said:

"Go and fetch Ben-Joël; we await him."

While the young man ran to the House of Cyclops, Cyrano informed the Count of what had taken place. He told him of the notes recorded in Joël's book, notes confirmed by the testimony of the Bohemian to which, in case of need, would no doubt be added that of Zilla, and Roland realized that he had at present but to bow before the fate prepared for him.

Manuel soon returned, bringing with him his former companion. At the sight of Roland, Ben-Joël's face suddenly lighted up; the strategic knave saw things beginning to assume a form.

An expression of satisfaction at the same time appeared on the Count's face. In that bandit with the air of a hypocrite, by his sidling gait, he had at once recognized a nature ready for all concessions, and he said to himself:

"It is there that I must strike in order to conquer."

Ben-Joël, questioned, docilely repeated all that he had said on the previous day. As on that day, he refused to give up the valuable book. On that point the Count did not insist, and, outstretching his hand to Manuel with apparent frankness, he said,

“My brother, all my doubts have vanished. Bergerac answers for you, and I feel by the action of my heart that you are indeed he I was awaiting; come, I will myself present you to my servants, more than one of whom will remember the lost child.”

“That is well-said, but is it sincere?” wondered Cyrano. Manuel took the hand which his brother gave to him and kissed it respectfully.

“See him,” said Savinien to the Count, “he is truly graceful; in less than eight days, we will have made a bean of him.”

“In less than eight days,” mentally repeated the eldest of the Lembrats, “he will have resumed his rags.”

Turning toward Ben-Joël he said, pouring into the Bohemian's hand all the gold his pockets contained, “there is the first proof of the pleasure you have caused me.”

Then, in a very low voice, he added, while Manuel was weeping with joy on Cyrano's shoulder:

“Where can you be found, if one has need of you?”

“At the House of Cyclops, near the porte de Nesle, my lord.”

XI.

ROLAND DE LEMBRAT'S dwelling was on rue Saint-Paul. On arriving at Paris, where he counted on spending the greater part of his time, the Count had bought a mansion on that street surrounded by gardens and having a seignorial look which flattered its new proprietor's vanity.

The first floor of that spacious house was, for the most part, one room panelled with oak and decorated with the heavy gilding such as is still to be seen in the old apartments of the Louvre. Other rooms opened around that one, one of which was Roland de Lembrat's bedchamber.

Two days after the scenes just read of, the Count having dismissed his attendants, was pacing the floor of that room in great agitation. When he had walked all over the room, stopping occasionally and growling like a caged tiger, he seated himself at a table and began to run cursorily over some papers. Then he seized a pen and made a line of figures with a pensive air, strange work for a gentleman of such gay and dissipated habits, as was Count Roland. What was he doing? He was simply calculating what his brother's resurrection would cost him.

His calculation ended, Roland ran his pen over the paper and buried his face in his hands. Evidently the solution of the problem he had been studying was not yet clear to his mind.

"Bah!" he cried, suddenly rising, and as if reply-

ing to an inward thought: "To what purpose? I know something better than that; when a knot cannot be undone, it should be cut."

The Count took the candlestick, shading the light with his hand; he opened a door and entered a corridor running along the main apartments. At the end of that corridor, he extinguished the light he was carrying, raised a drapery and found himself in a small study, the floor of which was covered with a carpet that deadened the sound of his footsteps.

Extending his hand, the Count walked on tiptoe to the wall and groped for a bolt sunk in the partition. The bolt found, he drew it out cautiously and applied his eye to the hole in which it fitted. This is what Count Poland then saw:

A young man was standing in the next room; it was Manuel, it was Ludovic de Lembrat, installed in the mansion on rue Saint-Paul since the preceding day. An elegant costume of grey satin set off his handsome face and his haughty carriage admirably. There was no longer anything about his person to recall the man of former days. Manuel had almost nothing to learn on entering his new condition. Better informed than the majority of the men of his day, he had instinctively adopted gallant manners and could appear to advantage among them.

In order to touch briefly upon his past and to connect it with the events which are about to follow, we will relate how the young man's love for Gilberte de Faventines had its birth. It is a simple story, as old as man, yet ever new! He had seen Gilberte once at her window, and like a visionary, like a poet, like a madman,—entrancing madness,—his soul and his eyes

had drunk in the vision. To love was life! Mamei loved. He cared not if the object of his love were far away or near him; he saw her by stealth; at night he stole along the walls, scaled her window to place a bouquet on the rails of the balcony, and went away.

That was all.

And he was happy, happy in the mystery, in the deep thrills experienced by him for the first time, in the chimera which filled his mind with doubtful dreams. He did not even know the name of his divinity. What one loves above all else in those sweet preludes of passion, is not the beloved, but Love with its charming uncertainties, with its great delights composed of a thousand rapturous nothings.

Now that Manuel could reason with himself, now that he was somebody, his vague sentiments began to assume a tangible form. Love to him was no longer an aimless power. His religion had an idol from which nothing could any longer separate him. He could hope, he could choose.

Such at least was his belief, at the moment when Roland de Leubrat came to spy into the intimacy of his new life.

The Count looked at Mamei. The young man was not alone, for he was talking animatedly. Roland sought the listener, whom at first he could not see whom his brother was addressing, and espied Cyrano reclining in a large armchair, by the fireplace.

Having made that discovery, the Count no longer thought of looking; he listened. The poet's clear, rhythmical voice did not fail to reach his ear.

"So, my dear Ludovic," said that voice, "you are satisfied with your brother?"

"Very well satisfied! he treats me with great kindness."

"That is natural; but, tell me? . . ."

"What?"

"Has he spoken to you of the main question?"

"What question?"

"Your fortune."

"He has said nothing to me, and I have asked him nothing."

"A reserve which does you honor; however, it must be done."

"Why? My brother has welcomed me cordially; he has anticipated all my wishes; I have nothing to ask."

"Oh! those poets!" smiled Cyrano, "how cheaply they value life! Fortunately, I am here."

"What would you have?"

"Zounds! I desire your independence to be assured, for you to be not under obligations to, but an equal of your brother, and for that. . . ."

"For that?"

"I shall turn to account your father's will."

"I beg of you, do not wound Roland's feelings."

"Rest assured, I am referring only to the future. Remain in the position your brother has given you for one or two months; after that, we shall see."

"That is it, let us wait; there will always be time to raise those objectionable questions; moreover, I have more serious affairs."

"What are they?"

Manuel looked at Cyrano, then with a sigh, he said:

"Savinien, have you forgotten my love?"

"The devil!" said the poet, with a grimace, "that

is indeed where the shoe pinches. Your brother is ahead of you, my friend."

The Count paid the closest attention, for, as if they had an intuition of his espionage, the two men lowered their voices obviously.

"My brother!" repeated Manuel. "Does he indeed love Mademoiselle de Faventines, or is the marriage but a matter of convenience?"

"He loves her, I believe, but it remains to be seen if she loves him; for I do not think she does."

"And then?"

"Then, there will be only the question of respect for the pledged word, and out of common decency you cannot think of asking your brother to give up his position."

"That is true," confessed Manuel, sadly, "I am obliged to be silent. However. . . ."

"Finish. . . ."

"If Mademoiselle de Faventines herself. . . ."

"Presumptuous youth, have you guessed that she loves you?"

"No; but is it not allowable for one who feels himself threatened in that which he holds dearest, to cling to any hope?"

"Undoubtedly. One word, nevertheless. Shortly you will see Gilberte, for you and I cannot close the Faventines mansion against Viscount de Lembat as we would against the adventurer, Manuel."

"Well?"

"When you see her, what will you do?"

An uncontrollable tremor shook Manuel's voice.

"To see her," he said with a sort of *naïve* fear, "to

“speak to her without offending her! I had not thought of that!”

“You must think of it; come!”

“Well,” replied Manuel, after a brief silence, “you may call me a culprit, an ingrate, disloyal; but if I see Gilberte, if I speak to her, my first glance will be a gleam of passion, my first word a confession of love; I feel it by my trembling hand, by my throbbing heart; I shall not have the strength to keep my secret. I am a savage, you see, Savinien; the garments I wear have not entirely changed me. If I cannot resist the voice that cries to me: ‘Love, go and cast your heart at that woman’s feet,’ if I am guilty of the cowardice of betraying my brother’s trust, I shall go to Roland and say to him: ‘Drive me away, disown me, give me back my tatters and my poverty, forget that I exist, but do not ask me to renounce my love!’”

“And then?” coldly inquired Cyrano, without appearing surprised at the quasi-fierce tone in which that declaration was made.

“Then?” continued Manuel, “will not my name be left me?”

“That is a meagre fortune.”

“That will suffice for the king to accept me as one of his soldiers; anything can be attained with courage and good will.”

“A cloak and a sword are very little, my dear, and the Faventines coat-of-arms are greatly in need of re-gilding.”

Manuel was no longer listening. He was dreaming, he was building another air-castle.

“It is late,” said Cyrano, rising, preparatory to taking his leave. “You must reflect on all this; the



most prudent course, however, would be to forget all."

"No!" returned Manuel, curtly.

"After all," concluded the poet, putting on his sword, "come what may, you know that I wish you well."

"I know enough," thought Count Roland, leaving his point of observation to return to his room, "secret warfare will not do away with that man, it takes a thunderbolt."

After that reflection, he rang the bell. A valet appeared. By the way in which he approached his master, it was easy to see that he was no servant of the ordinary kind. His face lighted up with a smile almost familiar; it could be seen that he was one of those scoundrels who know themselves to be indispensable on certain occasions and whose scruples have passed into the state of legend.

He calmly advanced and stood before his master, awaiting the question he was about to put to him.

"Rinaldo," said the Count, "do you remember what I said to you yesterday?"

"If I remember aright, my lord spoke to me of his young brother's arrival and of the slight unpleasantness it caused him."

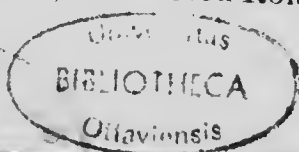
"I told you also that I should have need of you."

"Here I am," replied Rinaldo, simply, not without a tinge of pride.

"In a week's time," continued Roland, "there will be no other master here but me."

"So soon?" said the confidant; "we agreed, it seems to me, my lord, that this would come later on."

"I have changed my mind," answered Roland, drily.



"Then there remains to us only to find the means of ridding ourselves of the young man creditably."

"Precisely."

"We have first the definitive suppression?"

"No, no blood . . . at least not yet."

"Denial of the proof?"

"Perhaps."

"The testimony of several excellent people whom I know."

"We will think about that; just at present you must accompany me. We must win over first of all the man who holds the secret of Manuel's birth in his hands. As far as Cyrano, who has put this matter in my way, is concerned, we shall see about that later."

"Where are we going?"

"To the House of Cyclops."

Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the Count and Rinaldo, both well-armed, arrived without accident at Ben-Joël's lodgings.

When the bandit saw Roland de Lembrat, he smiled with supreme eloquence.

"I expected you, my lord," said he.

"You expected me, wherefore, I pray you?"

"Because I have reflected and observed a great deal, my lord," he replied, with bantering impudence.

The three men shut themselves in Zilla's room and held a long and mysterious conversation. When the Count left the House of Cyclops, day was breaking.

Roland de Lembrat seemed radiant. Zilla, leaning on her window-sill, allowed the fresh morning air to fan her brow, while a smile not to be defined played about her parted lips.

XII.

ROLAND was in no hurry to present his brother to the Marquis de Faventines. But the latter put an end to the Count's hesitation by coming in person to the home of the Lembrats to congratulate Manuel on his resurrection. That same evening the two brothers repaired to the Marquis' mansion on his express invitation, and for the first time since the scene of the improvisation, Manuel found himself in Gilberte's presence.

"Mademoiselle," said Roland de Lembrat to the maiden, with a smile whose perfidious sweetness no one remarked, "here is the audacious poet whom you so cleverly inspired the other day. He can now repeat rhymes to you at his pleasure. He is no longer a stranger, he is my brother . . . yours," he added, meaningly.

Gilberte and Manuel looked at each other, and a brilliant flush suffused Mlle. de Faventines' face, while the young man stammered several words whose meaning he did not even know.

That introduction gone through with, Roland left his brother and his *fiancée tête-à-tête*, and seated himself beside the Marchioness. It pleased him to play with fire thus, to give free scope to Manuel's amorous enterprises. The possible results of that interview troubled him little. Did he not feel his power, and did he not now know that by one word, if he wished, he could fling his brother back into the gutter from which Cyrano had taken him?

When the embarrassment which at first possessed him was dissipated, Manuel resolutely took his seat by the side of Gilberte and decided not to lose a moment in emerging from the position the delicacy of which Bergerac had clearly pointed out to him. Mannel, we have seen, had an impetuous nature, strangely composed of audacity and reserve; his mind had not, perhaps, the strength which circumstances required. On finding his brother again, he had promised him obedience, friendship and respect; and now his love was already carrying him away and he no longer remembered his promises. Thinking he was doing sufficient in renouncing the benefits of his birth, he went, without scruples, where his heart led him. He was young, he was ignorant of the petty compromises current in the world, and above all, he loved madly. Who could have reproached him that that love reigned absolute in his mind?

"Mademoiselle," said he to Gilberte, "the great event which has taken place in my life has not caused me to forget the past. And, in that past, there is one thing for which I owe you an apology."

The young girl had almost looked for this. Nevertheless she started; then, remembering that she was no longer in the presence of the poor street-singer, but of a gentleman, her *fiancé's* brother, and that it was impossible for her to escape from the perilous conversation, she hid her feelings beneath a grave, almost icy manner, and looked at Manuel as if in inquiry.

"Yes," resumed the latter, "I owe you an apology. When I was nobody, my boldness, great as it was, could not reach you; now. . . ."

As he hesitated, Gilberte repeated:

"Now?"

"Now," Manuel concluded, "I feel that the gentleman should apologize for the insult offered you by the adventurer."

"You have broken with your old life, sir; you should forget everything connected with it."

"Forget!" exclaimed the young man. "You ask of me the only thing it would be impossible for me to promise; bid me humble myself before you, remind me of the respect I owe you, but do not require me to sacrifice my souvenirs."

Gilberte made no reply.

"See, mademoiselle," went on Manuel, intoxicated by the sound of his own words and utterly dazzled by Gilberte's radiant beauty, "I must confess to you. When you know my whole life, you will perhaps have a word of kindness or of pity for me."

He spoke on, encouraged by his auditor's silence; he related all he had suffered, all he had dared. He told how at night he had stolen under the shadow of the walls of the Faventines mansion; he explained the mystery of the bouquets, which blowed daily at Gilberte's window; he related all his dreams, all his vain hopes, all his poetical and lover-like madness.

As she listened, Gilberte felt her heart melt within her breast and her breath came in gasps. She forgot her father, she forgot Roland, she forgot everything.

The sight of Roland aroused the young couple from their painful and yet delightful situation. The Count had been there a minute, watching them with eyes that shot fire.

That night, Manuel left the Marquis' *salon* and en-

tered his apartments, without recovering from the rapturous trance into which his conversation with Gilberte had plunged him. Viscount Ludovic visited the Faventines mansion daily after that.

The rest can be imagined. Manuel and Gilberte loved each other. The confession of that love escaped their lips almost ere they were aware of it; the future was now before them full of trouble and menace.

In about a week after his visit to the House of Cyclops,—matters being at the point of which we have just made mention,—Count Roland de Lembrat invited his future father-in-law, together with Mme. de Faventines and Gilberte, to be present at a *fête* he proposed giving the day after the morrow.

“I suppose you have no objection,” he concluded, “to my inviting M. Jean de Lamothe, your erudite friend, to this reunion.”

“The grand provost!” exclaimed Gilberte’s father. “Why! my dear Count, you know quite well that he does not take pleasure in our profane orgies.”

“Never mind, he will come, and I promise you he will fill his place well at Hôtel de Lembrat,” said the Count, with a smile, which, in spite of himself, wandered toward Manuel.

The *fête* of which Roland had just spoken was not to be an impromptu affair. Rinaldo had made active preparations and all was ready when his master gave out his invitations. On the morning of the eventful day, Ben-Joël received a note containing simply these words:

“To-night.”

While the plot to destroy him was being planned in the shade, Manuel dressed for the *fête*, humming a

love-song in which the name of Gilberte was constantly occurring like a sweet refrain.

Roland de Lembrat undoubtedly had many friends, for a brilliant gathering crowded his *salons*. To this especial *soirée*, he had bidden the *élite* of court and city. It was rather stifling, a condition indispensable to the success of an entertainment.

The first face which the Marquis de Faventines perceived, on entering the drawing-room, was that of M. Jean de Lamothe. The grand provost looked graver and stiffer than his costume.

"You here?" said the Marquis to him, gaily, "you the *savant*, you the sage, in the midst of this frivolous throng?"

"Justice is everywhere, Marquis," replied the old man, solemnly.

"I know it; it is not, however, the judge but the friend I meet here, I believe?"

"Both, Marquis."

"You are very serious to-night; have you still a grudge against Bergerac, and, knowing that you would find him here, have you come to convict him of magic, of heresy and of contempt against religion?"

"No! but Bergerac's turn will come, I have no doubt."

"Very well! And whose turn *has* come, if you please? We are all here for our pleasure; we are celebrating the presence of Ludovic de Lembrat, we are sharing his brother's happiness; are we unwittingly, my dear friend, treading on serpents, or does the Count's house conceal conspirators?"

"No," replied Jean de Lamothe, drily.

"Then I cannot understand you."

The grand provost leaned toward the Marquis' ear and uttered several words in a low voice.

M. de Faventines, on the receipt of that confidence, let his arms fall at his sides, and said, in great stupefaction :

"Bah! is it possible?"

"It is, as I have the honor to tell you. Count de Lembrat has informed me; I shall do my duty to the end."

"Strange! strange!" murmured the Marquis, moving off on the grand provost's arm.

Just as the two men passed through the door of the first *salon*, they saw Gilberte advancing, escorted by Manuel.

The Marquis started as if to run toward the young man and to snatch his daughter from him, but Jean de Lamothe restrained him, saying :

"Control your feelings; it is not yet time."

Manuel and Gilberte passed and took their seats at a window opening on the grounds. The night was clear and warm, vague perfumes filled the air, in the depths of the group of trees could be heard voices and bursts of laughter.

"So you confess it," said Manuel, to whom the story of the commencement of his love was an inexhaustible theme, "you recognized me?"

"From the first moment; a divination, no doubt."

"Ah! you will make me proud, Gilberte. What! you loved me, the poor Bohemian, the street-poet, in spite of prejudices, in spite of the world?"

"And in spite of myself, Ludovic. Yes! I have suffered, assured that nothing could reunite us, and I



agreed to live, sacrificed perhaps, but guarding, as a consolation, the memory of my first emotion."

"Dear Gilberte! When may I proclaim my happiness aloud?"

"When you shall have the courage to tell the Count the truth sincerely, as I shall tell it to my father."

"Roland! that is true, I had forgotten him. I always forget him. Why was it necessary that on giving me a relative God should present to me the cruel alternative of choosing between ingratitude and unhappiness!"

"God should not be accused here, Ludovic."

"Who, then?"

"Myself. I did not have the courage to resist my father's wishes, although I did not love the Count. But, now, I shall speak."

"And my brother?"

"Your brother is too loyal and too just to be displeased with you on account of my feelings."

"Let us live in the present, Gilberte."

"Let us live in the present and let us hope in the future."

Cyrano had just entered; he saw the two lovers and joined them.

A few moments later, Count Roland appeared in his turn. After receiving the majority of his guests, he withdrew to his room for an instant, where he held a hurried conference with Rinaldo.

"All is ready," the latter said to him.

The Count approached Savinien de Cyrano with alacrity.

"Ha!" said he, "you are late; we were awaiting only you to have the entertainment."

“What entertainment?”

“A little music, a little ballet.”

Then to Gilberte, he said:

“Behold, Mademoiselle, you are the queen of this *fête*, and I am your humble servant. Shall I give the signal?”

“Certainly!” said Gilberte, eagerly.

The Count clapped his hands. A curtain stretched from one of the corners of the *salon* was raised, and musicians seated on a small platform played the opening measures of an *air de ballet*. The curtain when raised disclosed to view a stage on which some Italian dancers, then the rage in Paris, were about to appear.

The entertainment was short; it was only the prologue to the comedy being prepared.

“It is charming,” said Cyrano. “You are a man of taste, my dear Roland.”

“Am I not?” replied the Count, ironically. “Oh! I have a number of other surprises for you.”

At that moment, Rinaldo’s fantastic form was seen in the frame of a door. The rogne was carrying a tray of refreshments; he was followed by other servants, performing the same office. For the occasion he had assumed an honest, decent and almost innocent air.

“See!” cried Cyrano, “is not that that knave of a Rinaldo, who lived at Fougerolles when we were children, friend Roland?”

“It is,” replied Roland.

At the same time he cast a significant glance at the provost, as if to call his attention to what was taking place. The provost gravely inclined his head, in token of comprehension.

By some fortuitous coincidence, or perhaps in consequence of a clever manoeuvre on the part of Roland, all the principal personages in the assemblage were grouped around him.

Rinaldo went around the circle, respectfully offering his tray, and was not long in reaching Manuel. But, instead of offering him the refreshments, he began to stare at him, as if deeply absorbed in thought.

"Well, why do you look at me thus, my friend?" asked the young man.

Rinaldo started and played his rôle of one surprised in a fault, marvelously well. The tray slipped from his hands, and the crystal was shattered into atoms on the floor. That noise had the effect of attracting the majority of the guests toward the point where the scene was being enacted. The Count had the audience he desired.

"Clumsy fellow!" he said to Rinaldo.

The man bore the epithet without wincing, and, drawing near his master, he spoke several words rapidly.

"Do you know, brother," asked Roland de Lembrat, in a loud voice, "do you know what caused the man's confusion?"

"Tell me, I pray you," replied Manuel, calmly.

"Well! he claims that he knows you."

"It is possible. As for me, I do not know him."

"Yes, he claims to," persisted Roland, "and he adds. . . ."

"He adds? . . ."

"That you are not my brother."

A . . . stir of curiosity was noticeable in the thr. . . The aristocratic assemblage scented a scan-

dal. Manuel seemed stunned. However, he regained his self-possession, and attempting to smile, he stammered :

“Your servants are jokers, forsooth!”

“Ah! there is a viper under the rock,” murmured Bergerac.

Rinaldo was standing erect in the centre of the group. Manuel approached him, and laying his hand on his shoulder, looking into his eyes, he said to him: “Come, my friend, look at me well, and tell me who I am, if I am not Viscount Ludovic.”

The valet seemed embarrassed.

“With due deference, my lord,” he ventured, “you are Simon Vidal.”

“Simon Vidal, the son of the de Lembrat’s gardener!” sneered Cyrano. “By God! that is a singular claim!”

“Yes,” reiterated Rinaldo, “little Simon, who was lost the same day that our poor master’s second son was.”

Cyrano shrugged his shoulders, and, turning toward Manuel, said :

“That man is mad; you need not answer him.”

“Desist; it is essential that every one should witness my sincerity.”

And again addressing Roland’s valet, he said :

“Your memory is either very good or very obliging, rogue! By what do you recognize Simon Vidal, who was five years old when he disappeared?”

“Bah!” objected Rinaldo, “I was his age, and I can see all his features in yours, which I have been studying for the past week. Moreover, if any doubt remained, a certain detail would remove it. One day,

when playing with Simon, I cut his forehead with a stone I threw at him. The wound was large and deep, my faith!"

And Rinaldo, pointing his finger at Manuel's brow, added calmly:

"There is the scar."

At those words, a murmur ran through the throng.

"Miserable wretch!" cried Manuel, "you have been paid to spread such calumny. Brother, in the name of truth, send away this man."

Roland sneered contemptuously. His turn had come to speak in the clearly infamous scene.

"Down with the mask, sir!" he replied; "this man has spoken the truth; you have deceived me for eight days."

"What does he say?" whispered Gilberte, who witnessed the scene in a sort of stupor.

"Beware of what you do, Roland!" suddenly interposed Cyrano, without giving his *protégé* time to answer.

"Cease, Bergerac; for three days I have known that he who styles himself my brother is an impostor; for three days I have controlled my anger. A servant's testimony is insignificant, I know full well; but, by means of inquiries, of questions and of threats, I have collected other testimony more fatal. Certain of trapping the culprit, I allowed him to remain in his false security; I wished to confound the wretch in the midst of the *fête*, before the eyes of that world that saw me receive him with open arms. The verification has been startling and public; the punishment shall be startling and public in its turn."

Manuel instinctively took refuge near Cyrano.

“Savinien ! Savinien !” he murmured, in despair, “defend me, for I can find nothing to say.”

Cyrano was ready with a reply.

“Ah ! you are playing a terrible part, Count de Lembrat,” said he. “Think of it : the proofs of Ludovic’s identity exist, and I have a weapon in my hands, the value of which you do not know : your father’s will.”

“You have been deceived as we all have, Cyrano : this man is not a de Lembrat ; he has taken advantage of and abused your first impulse ; and you, in not being sufficiently mistrustful of a spontaneous impression, have encouraged the deceit of which I am the victim.”

All this was uttered with extreme composure. Roland de Lembrat was certainly a formidable adversary.

“But,” persisted Cyrano, boiling over with rage, “what of Ludovic’s resemblance to the Count ? The written proof ?”

“I have nothing more to say,” concluded Roland, coldly. “I have denounced the intrigue, it is the provost’s business to see that justice is done.”

“Ah ! the provost is in the combination, is he ? I must compliment you, Roland, you have prearranged everything carefully.”

The provost advanced, and, with a satisfaction which he did not take pains to conceal, he said :

“Yes, sir, all has been prearranged. Nothing escapes the judge’s eye, do you hear ? Nothing ! Think of that. For three days, on M. de Lembrat’s information, I have been working to demolish what you have erected ; I have secured and examined your accomplices.”

"My accomplices!" growled Cyrano. "Great God! provost, take heed of your tongue, if you do not desire a quarrel!"

Jean de Lamothe prudently retreated before a menacing gesture on the part of the irascible author of the *Voyage à la Lune*.

"Softly, softly, M. de Bergerac," he ventured once at a respectful distance, "I am not a duelist! My name is not Captain Satan. I am about to prove to you clearly that Count de Lembrat has just acted according to his duty."

"What are you about to do?"

"To produce witnesses!"

"What witnesses?"

"The Bohemian Ben-Joël and his sister."

"Ben-Joël!" exclaimed Mannel. "I am saved."

Cyrano uttered an exclamation of anger:

"Simpleton, do you understand nothing?"

Indeed, Manuel understood nothing; he did not suspect the depth of the abyss toward which he was being dragged.

The door opened, Ben-Joël and Zilla appeared, Mannel moved forward as if he would go to meet them; then, suddenly looking at them, he started, panted and turned exceedingly pale.

Ben-Joël's face was as cloudy as a rainy sky; Zilla's like marble.

At that moment Mannel realized that he was indeed lost. On the other hand, Cyrano seemed to meet his fate patiently. He seated himself with great *sang-froid*, and watched the proceedings.

## XIII.

THE two adventurers paused on the threshold.

“Advance and speak freely.”

Ben-Joël cast a circular glance at the attentive assemblage, as he slowly advanced to the table at which Jean de Lamothe was seated, and replied in a very humble tone :

“His lordship, the provost knows having already confessed my wrong to him, I need no longer fear his severity.”

“We shall see. Do you know this man?”

The Bohemian turned toward Ludovic, pointed out to him by the provost :

“Yes,” he said, simply ; “it is Manuel, my companion.”

“Very well, that frankness will be credited to you. Now tell these gentlemen, as you have told me, the reason which determined you to pass off this Manuel for young Ludovic de Lembrat.”

“Yes, knave,” interposed Roland, “tell us that ; for I especially have been the dupe of your dishonesty.”

The bandit began in a light tone :

“Ah, my lord, my fault is very pardonable. Chance brought me into the presence of M. de Bergerac, and M. de Bergerac believing by certain signs to recognize Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat in Manuel, I profited by his good intentions to make the fortune of one of my brothers, a fortune in which I would not fail to have my share, for Manuel is no ingrate.”



Ludovic, overwhelmed with astonishment, began to doubt himself in the face of Ben-Joël's explanations.

"It is a diabolical machination," interjected Jean de Lamothe.

Cyrano, who had not stirred up to that time, rose at the Bohemian's last words, and, planting himself before him, he asked :

"Who are you deceiving here, accursed Egyptian? This requires an explanation."

Zilla's brother bowed with rather satirical humility before his interrogator and replied :

"It is the truth, pure and simple, sir."

"You lie!" at that juncture cried Ludovic, shaking off his torpor. "Have you not the proof of my origin in your hands?"

"Yes," maintained Cyrano, "the declaration written in old Joël's family-book. Remember that fact, provost."

Jean de Lamothe smiled maliciously, and asked :

"M. de Bergerac, have you seen the book you mention?"

"No."

The provost shrugged his shoulders, and turning to Ludovic, inquired :

"At least you have seen it?"

"I have not seen it," confessed the young man, bowing his head, "but it was spoken of so often before me, when I was not interested in it, that I cannot doubt its existence."

"You have not seen the book," remarked the provost, without heeding Ludovic's observation; "the book does not exist."

In his turn Cyrano's mind became troubled. One

second sufficed for him to conquer that feeling; he was sure of Ludovic's identity, and reproached himself for his sense of hesitation, although it was excusable in so singular an adventure. Again, he approached Ben-Joël, whose wily villainy he appreciated for the first time, and shaking him roughly by his arm, he asked, not wishing to believe the provost's allegation:

"Is this true?"

"It is!"

Roland was triumphant. None of the elements of success on which he had relied failed him at that decisive moment.

"You see, gentlemen," he sneered, addressing his guests, "on what a wretched foundation that tissue of lies rested. I acted like a fool in the affair: I was satisfied with a vagabond's word of honor. Fortunately, all can easily be amended, and my credulity will not have cost me too dear."

"Oh! Savinien," murmured Ludovic, outstretching his hands to his friend, "accursed be the day on which you took me from my ignorance!"

"There is still another question," resumed the provost at that moment, anxious to pursue his inquiries, and abruptly calling the attention of Ben-Joël and those assembled, to himself. "You know the story of the kidnapping of Ludovic and of Simon Vidal, the son of the gardener of the de Lembrats?"

Ben-Joël inclined his head in token of assent.

"Then he whom you call Manuel here, is who?"

"He is Simon Vidal."

"But the stolen child? Ludovic?"

"Ludovic!" said the Bohemian in a faltering voice,

"he died at the age of eight, in my father's camp. That is all I know, my lord."

"You should know something else."

"What?"

"You should know," insinuated the judge, "if your friend Manuel was a sharer in your ambitious plans."

The adventurer hesitated. He was inspired by an impulse of honesty; at that moment Zilla's voice whispered these words:

"Do not ruin him."

At the same time, Count de Lembrat, passing him by, murmured:

"Remember."

Placed thus between two opposing influences, the Bohemian was rather perplexed. He had everything to gain by protecting Roland's interests, yet he did not want to displease Zilla, who, by one word, could mar all.

"Answer," rebuked the provost; "was Manuel the confidant, the accomplice of your projects?"

That peremptory question was like the grain of sand which suffices to turn the scale. It served to turn Joël's mind into the channel hurtful to Ludovic's vindication.

"Yes," he replied, "Manuel was my accomplice."

"Miserable wretch," roared the Viscount, beside himself, "you are lying again, you lie all the time! Oh! Zilla! my sister, my dear Zilla, tell them that they are mistaken in their judgment! You know me, you know that I am incapable of such fraud!"

Zilla had frowned when the accusing words escaped her brother's lips; when Ludovic, however, addressed

her, her face resumed its rigidity, and in a cold voice without raising her eyes, she replied:

"I never knew anything about my brother's and your plans; I have no one to accuse, no one to defend."

Then, in the depths of her heart, she thought: "He has fallen low enough; he may love me now."

Ludovic was on the point of speaking, but the provost imposed silence, by saying severely:

"Manuel, you are accused and convicted, it seems to me, of having usurped the name and the titles of Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat; you will await the decision of the law in the *châtelet*."

At a signal from Jean de Lamothe, the door again opened, admitting an officer, followed by several soldiers.

"In prison!" cried Cyrano, violently. "Ah! By God! that is going too far."

"Silence!" commanded the provost.

To the officer:

"Do your duty."

The executor of the provost's orders advanced to Ludovic and demanded his sword of him.

The young man, driven to desperation, flung himself into Cyrano's arms; repressing the tears of anger and of shame which rose to his burning eyes, he slowly drew his sword and gave it to Savinien, not wishing to hand it to the officer himself. Cyrano was calm again; he addressed the officer in a quiet voice, tendering him Ludovic's sword with a gesture almost courteous.

"This weapon," said he, "is that of a gentleman, no matter what they say of him. Receive it, therefore,

sir, with respect. As for you, provost," he continued, quite cavalierly, "I would say to you that I have not spoken my final words, if you have yours."

He then pressed Mammel's hand.

"Go without fear, my boy," he concluded; "go to your purgatory; I am free, and I hold the keys of Paradise."

After those puzzling words, Ludovic's strange friend turned on his heel, to the amazement of Roland and the provost, who were surprised to see him accept the result of the adventure so philosophically.

Meanwhile Ludovic had drawn near Gilberte.

"Adieu, mademoiselle," said he in a broken voice. "Forget me, my life is ended."

A sob choked him. He feared it would escape him; he was afraid of appearing cowardly, and, like a madman, he rushed out of the *salon* without looking at any one, and closely followed by the officer and the soldiers.

"Ah! father," murmured Gilberte, rushing into the Marquis de Faventines' arms, "I love him! I love him!"

"Unhappy girl, be silent," said the old man, "your tears are an insult to the Count."

The maiden rose, cold, resolute, inexorable:

"The Count! What matters that to me? I shall not wed him."

It was now the Marquis' turn to oppose the will which asserted itself so boldly against his.

"You shall wed him," he replied; "I have promised, I desire it."

Whilst Gilberte was borne away in a swoon, and whilst Ben-Joël wisely withdrew with Zilla, under the

conduct of Rinaldo, he whom they called Captain Satan, and who during that entire scene had seemed so indifferent to the protection of his reputation, having remained almost completely passive, Cyrano, we say, leaned toward Roland de Lembrat, and, smiling, said to him :

“ You have just struck a fine blow, but wait until you see the parry and thrust ! ”

XIV.

COUNT DE LEMBRAT rose.

"My dear Cyrano," he said, "I can appreciate your vexation, but I cannot help it; spare me an explanation for which I care little, or a vindication which would not convince me."

"You have anticipated my thoughts; a little patience, Roland. I do not desire to speak to you in the presence of your friends. You will thank me later for that reserve."

"I will thank you?" scoffed the Count.

"Yes; but, believe me, let it rest there for the present. Soon you will be at liberty, and we can then talk freely . . . if you consent to that."

"If you like, I will take leave of my guests."

"No, I am in no haste; I will wait."

An hour later, the *salons* of Hôtel de Lembrat were empty. Ludovic's arrest had put an end to the *fête*, and every one had taken advantage of the opportunity for a prompt retreat.

"Come with me," then said Roland to Cyrano, "we shall be able to talk better here."

Rinaldo, who had just returned, took a candlestick and preceded the two men. When they reached Roland's apartment, the latter dismissed his valet.

"Are we quite alone?" inquired Cyrano.

"Yes; but why this mystery?"

"The matters I have to confide to you must be heard by you alone. Your dignity demands it."

"My dignity?"

"Your dignity and your *amour-propre*. It is therefore in your interest that I ask you to avoid all indiscretion, for, for my part, especially after what has just happened, I care little for the curious who might hide behind the draperies in your room."

"Who would spy upon us? Whom do you suspect?"

"Rinaldo, who seems to me to share your confidence."

"Rest assured, no one can overhear our conversation. Speak. What have you to say to me?"

The expression of Cyrano's face, up to that time very placid, suddenly changed. His eyes lighted up, his lips curled scornfully, and in a firm voice he spoke these words:

"By God! First of all, I would tell you that you are a rascal!"

Roland rose, goaded by sudden fury.

"Sir!"

Cyrano seized his arm, and, pressing it vigorously, said:

"Softly, Count, do not get angry; you have lost the right to do so."

"Such an insult!" Roland again exclaimed. "Are you intoxicated, Bergerac?"

"You know very well," corrected Cyrano, "that I do not drink wine. Therefore I am not intoxicated; you, however, are afraid, and you are trying to reassure yourself."

"Afraid? Of what should I be afraid, I beg of you?"

"Of your own deeds. You know that I intend



to save Ludovic, and that to save him, is to ruin you."

"Manuel again?" cried the Count, in a disdainful tone. "Am I to be annoyed by that subject constantly?"

"Plague on it! you are exacting, and you have sensitive ears, sir. See here, you are awkward; the matter is as clear as spring-water, you wished to rid yourself of the burden imposed upon you by your brother's return, and you planned a ridiculous farce, forgetting that I was there to modify the characters. Had I wished just now, I could have made you cry for mercy before all, I could have made you shed tears of blood at your treachery."

"You?"

"I. You know very well that Manuel, that Ludovic is your brother, do you not? What is the use to dissimulate? No one can hear us."

"For God's sake, Bergerac, let us put an end to this. This conversation annoys me."

"It depends only on you to cut it short."

"How?"

"Acknowledge the truth! Do justice to Ludovic!"

"Ludovic is dead!"

"Ah! you know better than that. You have bribed the rogue they call Ben-Joël, and for a handful of pistoles he has but repeated the lesson you taught him."

"You will answer to me for these insults, Bergerac."

"As soon as you like after our conversation is finished. You have the book which contains the proof of Ludovic's identity; come, confess it?"

"Ben-Joël declared before you that the book never existed."

"It does exist. You have not it in your possession, I willingly admit, for the bandit is so cunning he would not entrust his valuables to the grasp of the devil. In that case, I will have the book myself."

Roland began to smile.

"Willing or not, I will have it, you may depend upon it," repeated Cyrano.

Those words were uttered with such energetic conviction, that the smile froze on the Count's lips.

"That statement having been made," continued Cyrano, "we will now, if you please, speak of yourself a little, for that is what I stayed for."

"Of myself?"

"Yes, the time has come to tell you a short story, so interesting, my faith, to the de Lembrat family, that your father took the trouble to write it out at length."

"I know nothing of the writing."

"I should have liked never to have had you know of it. But extreme remedies for great ills."

"What preliminaries! Would not one think you were about to pronounce my sentence?"

"Who knows!" scoffed Cyrano.

Then with a good nature which accentuated the irony of his smile, he said:

"Take a seat, Roland. I believe you are trembling?"

"Thank you," replied the Count, drily, pushing away with his knee the seat offered him.

"As you like. Listen. My story, I have no doubt, will altogether modify your ideas."

Roland shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture of impatience.

"I will commence," said the poet. "Comnt de Lembrat, your father,"—and Cyrano purposely emphasized the last word,— "was a man very jealous of the celebrity of his race and very desirous of perpetuating his ancestor's glorious name,—a noble ambition after all! However, after ten years of wedded life, the Comnt's wife had not yet presented him with an heir. The most skillful physicians, summoned to Château de Fongerolles, finally declared that Mme. de Lembrat would never have the happiness of becoming a mother. They had to be resigned: the name of de Lembrat would die out. This is beginning to interest you, is it not?"

"Continue," said Roland, curtly.

"The name of de Lembrat would die out, and the entire province lamented the fact, when, contrary to all probability, the Count joyfully proclaimed the pregnancy of his wife. Several months later, a son was baptized. But, do you know whence came that son, who was to enjoy all the luxuries of a prince? From the hovel of a sheep-shearer, one of the Count's poor tenants, named Jacques le Cornier."

"Absurd fable!" said the Comnt.

"It is not a fable, it is a story true to facts, written by your father, and signed by his hand. Comnt de Lembrat, strifling his pride, wished to force fate. He said to himself: 'My family name shall yet shine in the world; I will have a son in spite of God and of nature.' And, in secret he bought the shearer's child, sent the father and mother away, they died afterward in Italy, and forced himself to forget that his blood did not flow in the veins of the newborn. That child was Roland de Lembrat, was you!"

"Infamy!" cried Roland, exasperated, "you insult my father's memory!"

"The blow is hard to bear," continued Cyrano, tranquilly. "I agree to that. There is quite a gulf between a noble Count and a miserable shee-shearer. You must become reconciled to it. I will finish.— Five years after the arrival of the false son, contrary to the decision of science, the Countess became *enceinte* and gave birth to Ludovic, . . . to Manuel, if that name is more familiar to you. You can imagine the state of affairs. The Count's embarrassment, remorse, reproaches! Well! the folly was committed, it must be made the best of! The Count raised the two children, intending to think about the matter later on. You know the rest. Ludovic was stolen by Joël's band, and the Count despairing of ever finding him, had at least the consolation before dying of thinking that his name would survive in you. But as, after all, Ludovic might reappear, he wrote the confession I have just repeated to you and confided the care of the important document to me, for it also contains the expression of his last wishes."

Roland looked at the speaker with astonishment he did not seek to disguise.

"You may rest easy," added Bergerac; "in the document it simply requires, after giving the details relative to your position, that you return to Ludovic half of the family fortune. Count de Lembrat was a just man; he did not wish to remove you from the position in which he had placed you; he did not wish to make you answer for a fraud of which you were innocent."

"Oh! you are a demon!" exclaimed Roland, "you

are trifling with my credulity. How can I believe that my father acted as you say, and, if he did, how can I be positive that he left a written testimony of his deceit?"

"That writing exists, I give you my word of honor."

"Show it to me."

"Unfortunately, I have not it. Fearing some accident to myself, I entrusted it to the hands of a friend. Should I die, those hands will know perfectly well how to make use of the treasure they hold."

Those words, which removed the menace of immediate danger and exposed the statements to doubt, restored Roland's assurance.

"Then," he asked, "what shall you do?"

"Nothing, if you consent to recognize Ludovic's rights: if you persist in refusing what I ask, I will go for and publicly produce Count de Lembrat's will."

"Come, Cyrano, confess that you relied on your cunning, which is nothing compared to your boldness, to make me acknowledge an imaginary act of treachery. I am ready to give you satisfaction, sword in hand, for what I have just said to you; but I do not believe in my father's pretended confession."

"You do not believe it?"

"No, for if it be true, if it had not been an ingenious story invented by your poetical brain, you would not have spared me just now, you would have declared my lowly birth before all and have saved Manuel from prison."

"I allowed Ludovic to go to prison, because it was necessary."

"Necessary?" repeated the Count, perplexed.

"Indispensable to his safety."

"I do not understand you."

"I understand, that is enough. Oh! I have learned to know you, Count Roland. To have freed Manuel, whilst I should have gone after your father's will, would have been to expose him to some adventure. A dagger blow is quickly given. It is better for Manuel to be in prison. His imprisonment will save you from temptation and will perhaps spare you the remorse of a crime."

"Do you think me capable of murder?"

"After what I have seen," declared Cyrano, "I believe you capable of anything."

"Oh! this time," thundered the Count, "you shall make me reparation!"

"I do not wish to fight with you," said Cyrano. "I have a more serious aim to pursue. The declaration calls forth no shame: I have my proofs. Then, moreover, I should kill you, and, my faith, you would be out of the way!"

Roland's clenched fist struck the table on his side furiously; his adversary's mocking *sang-froid* overwhelmed him.

"Very well," said he, between his teeth; "go, I do not fear you. I shall be able to render your attacks powerless."

"Are those your final words?"

"Yes."

"So much the worse for you, in this case. With Ben-Joël's book, with your father's testament, I shall have weapons to overthrow you."

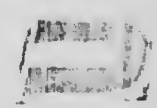
"Oh! as for the book, you shall not have it!"

"Ah! ah!" cried Cyrano, triumphantly, "then you at last confess that it exists!"

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Roland bit his lips until they bled, seeing too late the mistake he had made. He was about to reply, but Cyrano prevented him.

"I know enough," he said, preparing to leave, "now, to work. First, Ben-Joël; then, you."



## XV.

WHEN Cyrano had left the Count's room, the latter for an instant stood there motionless, considering the gravity of his situation. He knew Cyrano too well to doubt his word. The revelation just made to him roused his pride and laid before his eyes the depth of humiliation into which one indiscreet word from Bergerac could plunge him. The thought of Manuel's deliverance was the moment effaced from his mind; personal matters required all the resources of his intelligence. At any price the scandal of a public exposure must be avoided; Cyrano must be stopped, and rendered incapable of harming him.

That resolution made, Roland, not very scrupulous as to the choice of means, summoned Rinaldo. The latter, who served the Count's interests so well, came in immediately.

"Is your lordship ill?" he asked, remarking the change in his master's features.

"It is not that. Can you command Ben-Joël or some other cunning spies of his species?"

"Ben-Joël is at our service; we have paid him well for it, and I know him to be the man who will find us auxiliaries."

"In that case, do not let us lose one minute."

"What is to be done?"

"I desire,—for reasons into which you must not inquire,—to obtain possession of an important document written by my father."



"And the document is? . . . ."

"I know not where; Cyrano received it and in his turn entrusted it to the care of some one."

"The devil, that is very complicated!"

"It is not so complicated but that it can be disentangled with patience."

"And the money," said Rinaldo, who never lost sight of serious matters.

"You shall have it. The mission I have to entrust to you at present has four principal objects, viz:

"To watch Cyrano carefully, and, if he goes away, to know where he is going; to prevent him from reaching his destination; to obtain possession of my father's document, after discovering the name and the residence of him who has it, and lastly, if Bergerac, baffling all our ambuscades and finding out all our artifices, succeeds in regaining the valuable papers, to take them from him at any cost. I leave him in your hands, do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I see that you have given me a daring task. Captain Satan will not allow himself to be caught with chaff, and he has a devil of a *calichemarde* within gunshot of which it is not wise to venture."

"Coward! Ruffian! Scoundrel! Are you afraid?" cried the Count, angrily.

"Do not excite yourself. I may be afraid, but I am clever, and I will serve you better with my trickery than would a bravo with his sword."

"Besides, you will have Ben-Joël and his men to support you."

"I shall rely on them. When shall we take the field?"

"Immediately."

"That is to say from to-morrow morning, for by that time Bergerae, mad as he is, must be asleep with clinched fists."

"That is it. To-morrow, on my part, I will arrange to have Manuel tried without delay, and if the provost is too slow. . . ."

He did not complete his sentence; a sinister smile flitted across his pale lips. Roland was the man to reach and to strike Ludovic in the depths of the darkest prison cell.

"Ah!" the valet ventured to ask familiarly, "is the handsome Viscount still in the game?"

"Did you ask me a question, Master Rinaldo?"

Rinaldo colored and lowered his eyes hypocritically.

"Go," said his master, "and do not seek to know more than is necessary. Here are some subsidies to encourage your men."

The Count thrust his hand into the drawer of a piece of Florentine furniture, curiously inlaid with colored stones, with mother-of-pearl and ivory, and took from it a handful of gold which he threw, without counting, on the table in front of Rinaldo.

The Italian quickly gathered it up, put it in his purse, and obeying a gesture of dismissal made by Roland, he said:

"I shall have the honor of bringing your lordship the result of our first attempt to-morrow night. I go to think over my plan of attack."

Day was breaking when Roland retired. In vain did the Count slumber: it was impossible for him to rest one minute: he could still hear Cyrano's harsh voice ringing in his ears, while the name of his true father, of Jacques le Cornier, the sheep-shearer, seemed

to him to be traced in letters of fire on the walls of his room.

Meanwhile Cyrano was sleeping "with clinched fists," as Rinaldo expressed it. But he rose early, having reinforced his strength. He at once called Sulpice, who slept in the poet's study.

The secretary rubbed his eyes, then rose singing, positive proof of the ill-humor caused by being awakened so early.

"My boy," said Cyrano to him, "at present, it is not necessary to use your pen to write out odes, rondos, and ballads; the ink must be allowed to dry in the stand and you must take down a good sword."

"Are you going to fight?" asked the clerk.

"No; but you are going to accompany me on an expedition, and as the sword is as light in your hand as the pen, I shall not be surprised if you can aid me by some thrusts, if there should be need of them."

Sulpice Castellan's eyes sparkled. The youth had a warlike spirit, and delighted in escapades. At the same time, he grew suddenly grave: his ill-humor was dissipated as if by magic. He selected a sharp sword, bent it against the floor, and, having thus satisfied himself that it was worthy of his preference, he thrust it bravely into the sheath at his belt.

"By Hercules," cried Cyrano, "you have a gallant air, thus equipped, Master Castellan; it suits so much the better as we are about to visit a pretty girl's dwelling."

"Then why this warlike apparel?"

"Because the pretty girl might be supported by some knaves with sharp daggers and skilful hands."

"I understand. Are we going at once, master?"

"We will set out this evening. The twilight, my son, is a better guardian than the daylight of the secrets confided to it. If the stars are out, it will be wise to keep in the shadow, in order not to attract the attention of the officers, and in order not to scandalize the citizens too deeply. You can muse now a while near the Pont-Neuf, while I bid good-morning to M. Jean de Lamothe, our dearly beloved provost, may the devil take him!"

Having acquitted himself of that speech, the poet and his clerk, gaily and nimbly, set out on their way through Paris.

Jean de Lamothe condescended to tell Cyrano that Manuel's case required much consideration, and that probably it could not be tried for a whole month. That was all the poet desired to know. As a special favor, he obtained permission to send a note to the prisoner, in which he simply exhorted him to be patient; then he returned home. Castellan had not yet returned.

The poet breakfasted and commenced a lengthy epistle to Jacques Longnépée. The letter written, he locked it in a drawer, from which at the same time he took a purse of goodly proportions.

His secretary soon returned, making his sword ring as he walked.

"It is not time," said Cyrano. "We will dine at the Cœur-Hardy; that will help us to be patient."

"Oh, master, you always have such wonderful thoughts. I altogether forgot my breakfast and I feel hungry enough to eat stones, in imitation of Saturn, father of the gods."

The *Cœur-Hardy* was on rue Guénégaud, not far from Brioché's booth, the recent scene of Fagotin's deplorable adventure. From the windows of the low room in which the two companions were seated, a corner of the Pont-Neuf could be seen, and undoubtedly it was not unintentionally that Cyrano had chosen that inn in which to await the time for his enterprise. From the spot on which he was seated he could, without any trouble, see all that was happening without, and, as he ate and conversed with Sulpice, he did not lose sight of that part of the Pont-Neuf which he could see.

The day was drawing gradually to a close; soon the passers-by looked like shadows through the leaded windows of the tavern, and it became impossible for Cyrano to continue his search. That search had not evidently brought him the hoped-for result, for he uttered a low oath and rose, signing to Castellan to follow him.

They walked along the Seine, in the direction of porte de Nesle. As they proceeded on their way, Cyrano, in a discreet voice, gave Castellan the explanations he had not yet dared to ask for.

Soon they reached the House of Cyclops, which loomed up in the growing darkness, lighted near the top by the window in Zilla's room.

"She is at home," murmured Cyrano. "Let us watch a little."

The two men, enveloped in their cloaks, took up their post at several paces from the house, under the shelter of an immense elm, which spread its branches over their heads. One might have passed hard by them without seeing them, they stood there so mo-

tionless, and seemed to have become merged into the dark trunk of the old tree.

Pedestrians were rare along the bank of the Seine, and the bustle of the city began to decrease. It was the hour when law-abiding citizens sought their homes, and ramblers, prowlers on the cross-ways and other starlight cavaliers commenced their nocturnal enterprises.

Cyrano and Sulpice had watched a half-hour, when the door of the House of Cyclops opened noiselessly. A man came out, followed by two or three others. All of these passed our two characters without observing them. When the last of them reached Cyrano, the latter nudged his companion.

"Did you see him?" he asked, when the man was far enough away not to hear him.

"The man?"

"It was he! It was Ben-Joel!"

"My faith! I have not your lynx-like eyes, and I cannot prove what you say."

"I recognized him, and I confess that I am very glad I waited. Our task is greatly simplified, thanks to the knave's departure. My plan was not to make a stir, and we can now proceed with our inquiries in the most discreet manner in the world, in the sight of sweet Zilla. Let us enter without more delay, my boy."

XVI.

CYRANO emerged from the shade in which he had concealed himself in order to study the ground, and knocked at Ben-Joël's door. He had drawn his cloak over his face and pulled down his hat in such a way that only his eyes could be seen. Sulpice had taken the same precautions.

At the third stroke of the knocker, the old portress opened the door. In her hand she held a lamp, which she placed on a level with her two visitors' faces. Her inspection ended, and seeing that they were strangers, she was about to close the door, when a hand was outstretched, holding toward her, between thumb and forefinger, a bright *écu*, stopping her inhospitable intention. She quickly seized the coin from the tips of Cyrano's fingers, and a smile, half-gracious, lighted up her face.

"What do you want, sir?" she asked.

"Ha! old woman," chaffed Cyrano, "it takes a silver key to open your beak, does it? I desire to speak to Zilla!"

"What do you want with her?"

"You are curious."

"Zilla does not like to receive strangers, especially at such an hour and when she is alone."

Cyrano struck his purse, in which the gold and silver pieces chinked gaily.

"When the strangers have a well-filled purse to offer in exchange for the services they ask, Zilla, I

suppose, cares little what time it is. In a word, dear woman," he added, in a confidential tone, "I want to buy a love-philter."

"If it is for that, sir," said the portress, quite reassured, "you could not come to a better place. Enter, take that staircase, and ascend as long as you find steps under your feet."

Cyrano did not need so many instructions; he was familiar with the Bohemians' dwelling. Without hesitation he began the ascent of the winding wooden staircase, on the steps of which Castillan slipped two or three times, calling down upon the House of Cyclops a torrent of maledictions.

A faint ray of light coming from under Zilla's door served as a guide to Cyrano who, in the darkness on the stairs would have had difficulty in ascertaining where he was. He did not trouble to knock on the door, which yielded to his first pressure, and which almost unexpectedly brought the visitors into the presence of the mistress of the apartments.

Zilla, attired in a long gown of white silk, open in Eastern fashion upon her breast, with bare arms, encircled with gold bracelets, was slowly manipulating the contents of a dish of stoneware, placed on a small stove. The girl's face, flushed by the warmth of the fire, was extraordinarily striking; and when her black eyes, velvety and deep, were raised to the newcomers, Castillan felt himself enveloped in such warmth that he inwardly declared the sun was like ice compared to those two stars.

Zilla seemed neither surprised nor terrified to find her apartment thus invaded. She took from the fire the vessel in which she was boiling a blackish liquid,



threw back her somewhat disordered hair and advanced in silence to meet the strangers. Cyrano carefully closed the door, and, removing his cloak and hat, bowed before Zilla, not without a shade of irony.

"M. de Bergerac!" exclaimed the gypsy, turning suddenly pale.

"Is my visit a surprise to you, my beauty?" asked the poet. "You should, however, have expected to see me."

"Why?" inquired Zilla, curtsy, meeting firmly Cyrano's satirical glance.

"Because . . . but permit me," interrupted the latter, "to take precautions that we may not be disturbed. Castellan, my friend, lock the door and put the key in your pocket, I beg of you."

The young clerk obeyed and remained standing at the other end of the room, awaiting Cyrano's orders.

"What do you want with me?" asked Zilla, haughtily, knitting her brows at the sight of those preliminaries.

"Nothing very difficult," said Savinien; "if I take the liberty of locking the door, it is because just now I noticed that any one can enter your room without being announced, and I have a horror of intruders. I shall now, my queen, tell you why I am here."

Zilla replied only by a wave of her hand.

"I need not explain to you," began Cyrano, "that it concerns Manuel."

A tremor ran through the gypsy's form at the name which recalled so many memories; but her face remained inscrutable.

"Manuel is in prison," said the poet, with emphasis, "and it is you who have sent him there, Zilla, you and

your brother, by refusing to speak the truth. However, when the truth hides itself away, it is necessary to seek it in its hiding-place, and here I am."

"I do not understand you, sir," interposed Zilla, in an icy tone.

"It is, nevertheless, very simple. Ben-Joël maintained that Manuel was not the Count's brother after having sworn to me that he was; Ben-Joël denied the existence of the proof of this fact, after having given me the assurance that he held that proof in his hands. What would you have me think if not that your brother has placed himself at the service of another's passions and is sacrificing Manuel to I know not what miserable interest?"

"You should not reproach me, sir, but my brother."

"Your brother is an incredible knave, of whom I wish to ask nothing. I know, however, of something that will speak more plainly than he."

"And that is? . . ."

"Old Joël's, your father's, book. That book exists, it is here, I wish to buy it of you."

Zilla smiled scornfully.

"A bargain?" she asked. "From Captain Satan, from Cyrano the Invincible, a threat would have seemed nobler to me."

"Do not let us waste words, my dear. Then you confess that the book is in your possession?"

"I confess nothing."

"In that case, you will allow us to search for it!"

"To search for it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"That is a generous proceeding and worthy of a gentleman!"

"Who wishes to be generous, my dear! When you have ruined Manuel by an odious lie, do you consider a paltry question of delicacy?"

"Go, sir," cried Zilla, her bosom heaving with anger, her breath coming in gasps, "go, or I will not answer for myself."

At the same time she armed herself with a poniard having a short and narrow blade, and, bounding toward Cyrano, said:

"One scratch made by this blade, would be death; for this weapon has been steeped in a deadly and subtle poison. With it, I do not fear your swords; go then, for the last time I command you."

Cyrano smiled, and, with a movement quicker than thought, he imprisoned Zilla's wrist in his right hand, while with the other he easily took from her the poisoned dagger and passed it to Castellan.

"You see, my dear," said he, "how childish your anger is. Come, sit down here quietly, and let us act. If you resist, I shall be forced to bind you, for which I should be very sorry, I assure you, and if you should cry out, I should have the sorrow of gagging you, an action very distasteful to ladies."

Zilla, vanquished, sank into a chair.

"Search," she murmured in a faint voice.

Without losing sight of Zilla, who, her head in her hands, leaned upon a table covered with books, vials and various things, and seemed determined to see nothing going on around her, Cyrano and Sulpice began to overturn furniture and to rummage in the most secret corners of drawers. That task soon absorbed their entire attention. Cyrano thought that at any moment he might come upon the object of his efforts,

and each time his hopes were deceived; a terrible oath escaped his lips. Zilla did not seem affected by those bursts of anger. But, whilst he was busily engaged in his search for the book not to be found, Zilla's right hand slowly slipped from her brow to move along the table, where it seized a small strip of paper. She put it in front of her; with the same precaution she took a pen, dipped it in an ink-well and furtively traced two lines on the paper. That done, she rolled up her note, slipped it in a glass tube within reach, and rose just as Cyrano and Castellan approached the table in order to empty the drawers, their efforts up to that time having proved fruitless.

At Zilla's movement, Bergerac feared another attempt at resistance, and his keen eyes rested on the young girl, who did not mistake his intention.

"Continue your search," said she, with surprising docility; "I will not annoy you, I suppose, by resuming my work."

And taking Cyrano's permission for granted, she turned toward the stove built in one corner of the room, and resumed her stirring interrupted by the arrival of the two men.

"Very well," said Cyrano. "You are indeed a sensible girl, Zilla."

Zilla smiled pleasantly. Simultaneously her hand discreetly slipped a small iron trap, covering an opening made above the stove, which communicated with a large pipe, common in all the chimneys of the House of Cyclops.

Through that aperture, closed almost immediately, Zilla dropped the tube containing her note, and a gleam of triumph sparkled in the girl's eyes when she

heard the faint sound of the glass breaking on the hearth-stone of the ground-floor.

The cause of that triumphant expression can be easily understood. On hearing the glass break near him, one of the raganuffins sleeping in the parlor, a tall fellow with a complexion like bistre, with angular limbs and hair like wool, stole noiselessly toward the fireplace, picked up the note freed from its cover, and read it by the light of a lamp hanging from the ceiling.

"The devil!" he cried, "there is need of haste."

Zilla's mysterious correspondent turned the street-door on its hinges and rushed out.

The night was dark. Our man ran as fast as his legs would carry him toward the Pont-Neuf. Arrived at the head of the bridge, he gave a prolonged whistle, modulated in a particular way. A similar signal replied to him and was repeated until it reached the other bank of the Seine. Several instants later, five or six men were grouped around the messenger from the House of Cyclops.

"Ben-Joël," said the latter to one of them, "do you know what is going on at your house?"

"What, pray?"

"Zilla is the prisoner of two bold men, who are pillaging your apartments. She threw me a note in order that I might go in search of aid. Come, quick."

"Men at my lodgings!" said Ben-Joël, "who has dared?"

"Your sister wrote the name of Cyrano."

"Captain Satan!" exclaimed Ben-Joël. "Ah! I will repay him for his blows."

The bandit felt in his belt for the handle of his knife, and began to run toward the House of Cyclops, followed by his whole pack of bravos.

These various manœuvres had not taken more than a quarter of an hour. Cyrano and Castillan were still hunting. They had emptied drawers, cut open pillows, sounded the walls to no purpose.

"Nothing! Still nothing!" grumbled Cyrano, discontentedly. "We must look in the other room."

He looked at Zilla, who, standing motionless at the opposite end of the room, watched Savinien with a strange look, which greatly disquieted the young clerk; not that he was afraid, but because, accustomed to look for the reason of things, he vainly sought to explain the meaning of that glance.

"Help me, lazy fellow!" Cyrano called to him, resuming his quest.

Suddenly the poet uttered an exclamation of delight. Under an old carpet, he had just discovered a small iron-bound chest, which hitherto had escaped his investigations.

"At last," he cried, "here is the object's hiding-place."

A sudden movement on the part of Zilla seemed about to confirm the poet's suspicions. She seemed on the point of rushing upon him to prevent him from continuing his researches, crying at the same time:

"Wretch! Do not touch that chest!"

"Do you see, Castillan," said Cyrano, tranquilly, holding Zilla in check almost courteously, "this time we have dislodged the bird. If our lovely sibyl does not hinder us any longer, we will take it in our hands."

Zilla, however, seemed disposed to make serious resistance. Cyrano had difficulty in keeping her in her place, while Castillan drew the chest toward the centre of the room, in order to be able to open it more easily.

Suddenly Zilla ceased struggling. She had heard a sound on the staircase. The sound grew more distinct. The girl was not mistaken. The note had reached its destination; Ben-Joël and his followers were coming to the rescue.

"Ah! M. de Cyrano," she cried, freeing herself from de Bergerac's grasp to take refuge at the other end of the room, "you would not go away when I bade you; who knows now if you can go when you like?"

These words were scarcely uttered, when loud knocks, so much the more unexpected as Cyrano and Castillan had heard no noise before them, were heard at the door.

At the same time a thunder of furious and menacing voices came through the oaken door.

Cyrano straightened up.

"It is here, my boy," said he to Castillan, "that our swords must play their little parts. That accursed book is here; if we do not succeed in possessing ourselves of it before they break open the door, we will have to do this over again."

"I think," added Castillan, drawing his sword, "at present we should save our skins, which seem to me to be in great jeopardy."

A cracking sound was heard. The door had given way beneath the assailants' efforts. A violent push threw it off its hinges, and five men, led by Ben-Joël,

rushed into the room. All were armed with daggers or with swords.

"Now, my fine Captain," cried the Bohemian, when he was in the presence of Cyrano, "we shall settle our account at last! Forward, men, and no quarter to these coxcombs."

"Those are fine words," smiled Cyrano, disdainfully. "Make way there, knaves!"

"Kill him! Kill him!" cried Ben-Joël's band, rushing upon Cyrano and Castillan.

The sword of the nobleman of Perigord described a terrible circle in the air. The Bohemian recoiled, blinded by the bright steel.

"Make way there!" repeated Cyrano, rushing forward.

A sharp pain made him retreat in his turn. Ben-Joël had rushed at him and had traitorously stabbed him in his thigh, hoping to fell him thus and to finish him when he was once on the ground. Cyrano's sword was raised menacingly. Ben-Joël leaped back to escape the thrust and fortified himself behind his companions.

All returned to the charge. Sulpice sustained the assault, while Cyrano quickly tied his scarf around his wounded leg. The secretary proved himself worthy of his master. His long sword lashed the bandits' faces from right to left, striping three with a red line. Finally the sword returned to its normal position and became entangled with that of one of his assailants.

"Thrust!" cried Cyrano, who had just reëntered the *mêlée*.

Castillan took advantage of Savinien's advice. He did as he was bid, and pierced the breast of his adver-



sary, who fell groaning at his feet. Bergerac, at the same instant, felled to the floor a second bandit, and his sword threatened Ben-Joël's breast. The Bohemian was on the point of retreating again, when he slipped in the blood and fell upon one knee.

Zilla, who up to that time had witnessed the unequal struggle, impassive and in silence, now saw that Ben-Joël was lost. With the rapidity of thought, she seized a cape lying on a piece of furniture, ran up to Cyrano, and threw it over his head. Blinded and stifled by the folds of the material, the nobleman instinctively sought to free himself from that new kind of hood, while Castillan parried the blows aimed at him from all sides.

During his brief capture, Cyrano stumbled, and his injured limb struck a corner of a stool. The pain almost rendered him unconscious, and if, on extending his arm, he had not reached the wall which served him as a support, he would undoubtedly have fallen.

The four bandits, more skilful in handling the knife than the sword, stood by, for being quite saving of their skins, they did not know how to profit by Cyrano's dilemma. Castillan, moreover, fought like a demon, and his sword seemed to multiply in number in Bergerac's defence. When the assailants thought themselves of rushing in a body upon the nobleman, it was too late: the latter had succeeded in disengaging himself from the cape with which Zilla had muffled his head, and his weapon whirred at about two inches from the bravos' breasts.

Notwithstanding the advantage he had known how to maintain, Cyrano could not deceive himself as to the gravity of his situation. He must inevitably succumb.

That desperate thought caused him to bound forward with such fury that the Bohemians in confusion retreated toward the door. Ben-Joël uttered a cry of rage, on seeing his victim about to escape him. Not daring to venture into the flaming circle made by Cyrano's sword, he seized an oaken stool by the leg and threw it at the poet. Castillan sprang forward at the same moment and received the projectile intended for Cyrano. His sword fell from his hand, his limbs gave way, and he fell upon the ground.

That incident caused Cyrano to lose a part of his composure; when he went, regardless of his own safety, to lean over Castillan, another stool thrown by one of Ben-Joël's men broke the blade of his sword thus leaving him at the mercy of the assassins.

"He is disarmed! Death! Death!" yelled the Bohemians.

Zilla took a step toward the combatants. Perhaps she was about to save the life of the man whom she could not bear to see murdered in so cowardly a manner, when Rinaldo suddenly appeared at the door of the room.

On recognizing Cyrano de Bergerac, on seeing the four bandits, the dagger raised above the nobleman, the Italian rushed into the midst of the circle and restrained Ben-Joël's arm, ready to strike.

"Do not kill him!" he cried at the same time.

Then, in a low voice, dragging him far away from Cyrano, he added:

"Have you forgotten our agreement of this morning? He must live to put us on the track of the de Lembrat secret."

Ben-Joël's three acolytes, seeing their chief give

up the game, thought they must imitate him; instead, therefore, of continuing their attacks on Cyrano, they simply confined themselves to falling back toward the door, in order to render all attempts at flight impossible.

Castillan, during that short scene, had gradually recovered from the effects of the stun; Cyrano, being free, extended his hand to him and helped him to rise.

The brave nobleman was still wondering why Rinaldo's intervention had procured for him so unexpected a truce, when Roland's valet approached him very politely, and, endeavoring to force a smile upon his sinister face, said:

"M. de Bergerac, you may retire; you have nothing more to fear!"

"Ha! Master Rinaldo," asked Bergerac, proudly, "may I know to what I owe the favor of your pity?"

"I am happy to be able to rescue one of the Count's friends from an embarrassing situation."

"Hm! " is something beneath this. In any case, *naves*," continued Cyrano, glancing at the bandits who surrounded him, "if it is in the hope of a more successful victory that you allow me to escape, you are very much mistaken, for I swear to you that I will not spare you by any means when the occasion presents itself. Take my arm, Castillan. *Au revoir, Zilla.*"

And, as haughty as a satrap, the nobleman passed through the group of bravos, caring naught for their knives and naked swords, and walked calmly toward the staircase.

When he had disappeared, followed by Castillan, Rinaldo burst into mocking laughter.

“Without me,” he said to Ben-Joël, “you would have committed an irreparable act of folly.”

“I want his blood,” growled the Bohemian, with a savage air; “sooner or later I will have it, Rinaldo.”

“I wil' give up your man to you when I no longer have need of him. Rest assured, he shall not escape you; from now on, I consider him neither more nor less than a cock-chafer with a string tied to his foot.”

That metaphor on the part of M. Rinaldo put an end to the colloquy; the two wounded were carried away by their friends, and Zilia remained alone in her room, where the traces of Cyrano's passage were shown by the general disorder.

XVII.

ON the following day, a man, an old man who hobbled, stopped in front of Cyrano's abode, a sort of inn of tolerably fair appearance, and after a moment's hesitation, stole with an humble air into the coffee-room, on the ground-floor. The man wore a shabby black jacket, breeches that were too short, fastened to the jacket by a leather belt at which was suspended a writer's ink horn, while his stockings were of a greyish hue, and his large boots were without strings. A dirty cap covered the top of his head, from which hung long locks of grey hair.

The stranger presented a very pitiful appearance in that plight. His bowed form seemed drawn toward the earth by the weight of a small valise which he carried on his arm, while a short, dry cough from time to time shook his emaciated frame.

Although he looked more like a poor wretch come to beg alms than like a traveler in a position to pay his bill, the landlord, who was not unkind to the needy, advanced politely and asked what he wanted.

"A room, if you please," said the stranger, between two paroxysms of coughing.

"Do you know that you must pay the first week in advance?" insinuated the proprietor, gently.

"How much?" asked the old man. "I am not rich, and I have to be careful of my money."

"It will cost you a pistole a week. You come from a distance, no doubt, sir?"

"I come from Anjou," replied the traveler, untying the strings of his purse in order to pay the innkeeper.

"And you have probably come to practice your profession in Paris?" the landlord made so bold as to ask, "for if I can judge by the ink horn hanging at your side, you are a writer by trade."

"I am a poet," replied the man with a simplicity that did not exclude a certain pride, "and I have come to Paris in the hope of having one of my tragedies put on the stage here."

"How things come about! My house is just now honored by the presence of one of your fellow authors, the author of *Agrippine*, the great *Cyrano de Bergerac*."

"I knew it, master. That is why I chose your house in preference to any other, wishing to be in the vicinity of my Apollo-like master. For that very reason I would ask you if you could possibly give me a room near his. One likes to draw near the sun," he explained with a smile.

"If you like," said the landlord, "I will present you to M. *Cyrano*; he is a good fellow, no matter what they say of him."

"No, indeed!" said the man, rather hurriedly; "by doing so, you would embarrass me. Reserve your good intentions for the day on which I shall have put the finishing-touch to my work, that I am now re-touching."

"As you like. I have nothing more to offer you, in point of lodging, but a very small room; it is, however, directly above that of M. de *Bergerac*. In it, you will be able to hear him recite his verses, for he

enters into them with all his heart, and in a voice of thunder. Does that please you?"

"Greatly," replied the country-man. "It will be a treat for the gods."

"Follow me then; I will see you to your room."

The old man again took up his valise and, preceded by the landlord, he climbed the stairs leading to the upper floors not without coughing. On reaching the first landing, the tavern-keeper pointed to a door, saying:

"That is where M. de Cyrano is staying."

The rustic stopped and looked at the door with an air at once respectful and affectionate.

"There?" he repeated, clasping his hands devoutly.

"Yes, but come and go softly, for our poet is ill; he has some fever, and his secretary has asked me not to disturb his rest."

"Ah! Holy Virgin, what has happened to that peerless man?"

"He received a stab in some adventure; such things often happen to him, for he is, as you must know, as prodigal with his sword as with his pen."

"May God save him!" sighed the traveler, with unctiousness.

"Oh! he is in no danger. The doctor says it will take only five or six days to cure him."

"Heaven be praised!"

The conversation took place in the room which the honest innkeeper destined for his new customer.

"You are in your own room," he said to him, opening the window to air the small room; "when you are hungry, you can come downstairs or you can call Barbe, the servant, who will bring your meals to you here. You can take your choice."

“Thanks ; I am not rich enough to allow myself much luxury in the way of food and drink. Generally, if you will permit, I attend to my own needs.”

The landlord made a slight grimace on hearing that statement, which deprived him of a hoped-for profit, and, bowing to the stranger with a slightly disdainful air, he said :

“Every one is free to do as he pleases. Your servant, sir.”

When the door had closed upon the innkeeper, the little old man smiled quietly and cunningly ; his bent form straightened up, his eyes brightened, and, throwing his valise on the bed, he began to walk around the room with a light step, going from one corner to the other, discreetly moving the furniture, sounding the walls, and conducting himself as if he were about to pursue some mysterious inquiry. His limbs, so weak a moment before, served him marvelously well ; he no longer coughed, no longer limped, and had not his hair been grey, he would have passed for a young man.

Having examined the condition of his lodging at his pleasure, the old man opened his valise and took from it, no manuscripts, books nor papers, as one might have supposed, but a set of sharp files, a drill and a short air-cane. In the bottom of the half-open valise gleamed the butt-ends of two pistols.

Whilst the old man was handling the various objects with a reflective air, a low rap was heard at the door.

He hastily replaced in the bottom of his valise those tools so greatly out of place in a poet's hands, and was suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing.



"Come in," he cried, in a wheezing voice.

The landlord appeared.

"Pardon me, sir," he said; "I forgot to ask your name."

"My name is Mathurin Lescot."

"From Anjou?"

"Yes."

"Having come from Angers, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And in Paris for his pleasure?"

"I have already told you. Why so many questions?"

"Excuse me; it is the provost's order. In these troublous times he desires to know the minutest details. But, make yourself easy, they will not molest you; you have not the appearance of a conspirator!"

And with those words, the man closed the door again.

"A plague on the beggar!" growled he, who had just styled himself Mathurin Lescot; "why did he disturb me thus just as I was about to commence my task?"

A joyous voice singing a bacchic refrain suddenly reached the enigmatical old man's ears. It came from the lower floor, that is to say from Cyrano's apartments, and belonged to Sulpice, whose depression must have been very great, for he was singing at the top of his voice, in spite of the order for quiet given by him to the landlord.

Castillan was indeed very much provoked. The doctor had just told him that Cyrano's wound, which seemed now more serious than on his first visit, would perhaps necessitate treatment for a week or two. And Castillan was disconsolate at the thought that

his master would be obliged to keep his room just when he needed all his time and all his activity the most. Notwithstanding the physician's orders, Cyrano would not stay in bed. He was seated in a large easy-chair, and his wounded limb rested on a stool, covered with a soft cushion arranged by good Suzanne's careful hands. Hard by his hand was spread a white sheet of paper which Cyrano looked at, biting his pen, in the fashion of a poet who vainly courts inspiration. Suddenly, the injured man flung aside his pen and bade Suzanne take out of a drawer in a piece of furniture, which he pointed out to her, a letter that was there. It was the one which he had written the day before to the curé of Saint-Sernin. He broke the seal and began to read it attentively.

"Why rewrite it?" he murmured. "I need only add two words to this, and it will be all right."

He took up his pen, wrote rapidly after his signature several lines which he signed with a gigantic *C* to prove the authenticity of the postscript; then he again sealed the missive and called Castellan, whose interminable song made the room ring with its echoes. The secretary, interrupted in the midst of a couplet, thrust his piteous face in at the door.

"Come hither, musician of the devil," said Cyrano to him; "it is time to change the anthem. Have you any money?"

At that question, which seemed monstrous to him, Sulpice opened his eyes exceedingly wide and was on the point of disrespectfully asking his master if he had gone mad.

"Any money?" he repeated, as if he had not heard aright.

"I asked you, my boy, because I have only a few pistoles left, and because we need money, lots of money."

"Why not ask the thistle if it bears roses and the dog's-grass black cherries?" replied the secretary impertinently yielding to the temptation to mock which possessed him.

"Very well," said Cyrano, calmly, without noticing the clerk's observation, "then in order to be poor and miserable like Job, you need only a dung-heap to sit on, a potsherd to scratch you and a woman to abuse you?"

"Nothing could be more accurate nor better defined, dear master."

"You must, however, my boy, have, before this evening, a good horse, warm clothing and a full purse."

"The devil! Who will work the miracle?"

"We shall see. Take this ring I received from my friend, Colignac, and go with it to a Jew. He will give you a thousand pistoles, I think."

"Do you want to sell that jewel?"

"No; it is simply to be pawned."

As Cyrano spoke those words, a slight noise attracted his attention. It was the grating of an instrument on hard wood, and came from the joists of the ceiling, as far as the poet could judge, for the grating was very discreet and it was difficult to discover the exact cause of it.

"There are rats here," reflected Cyrano, aloud. "This house is certainly a hovel. I must bid Master Gonin put traps in his garrets, for want of which those gnawers will some day eat my books and my papers."

Had the poet been able to see what was going on over his head, he would not have been surprised at the cause of that noise slanderously attributed to the sharp teeth of the slow-trotting species. Like Hamlet, in Shakespeare's tragedy, he cried: "It is a rat!" and it was with a man he had to do. The mysterious guest on the upper floor was, at that very moment, squaling on the floor of his room, trying with the aid of his drill to bore a hole in it, that he might see into Cyrano's apartments. The hole made, he put in the air-cane, the projecting end of which was like the bell of an ear-trumpet, then he lay down flat on his stomach and put his ear to the orifice, just in time to hear Savinien's remark.

"I am saved," thought he, hearing the poet interpret as we have seen the slight sound which, in spite of all his precautions, the spy could not avoid.

Cyrano listened again, then, hearing nothing more, he turned to Castillan, saying:

"Go, find an honest Lombard, if there is one of that genus, and give him the ring in exchange for a carefully worded pledge, as I want to redeem the jewel."

"And then?"

"Then, with the proceeds of the pledge, you will fit yourself out as I have just told you, and return to me. Before leaving we must have a categorical explanation. But go; I will give you my instruction this evening."

"When am I to set out?" Castillan ventured to ask.

"To-morrow morning, please God."

"Will the journey be a long one?"

"That will depend on your activity and your horse's pace, my boy. Until this evening!"

"Until this evening!" assented Castellan, without further remark.

"It was time," said the man at the air-cane, leaving his post.

And, knowing that there would be several hours during which he could learn nothing more, he left his room, resumed his coughing and descended to the coffee-room, where, notwithstanding the caution taken with regard to Master Gonin, and to the latter's great amazement, he bade Barbe, the maid, bring him a slice of beef, an omelette and a measure of wine.

He quickly disposed of that repast and, putting aside his napkin, he spread before him a blank copy-book, which he began to fill with writing, with feverish ardor. Master Gonin, with the curiosity characteristic of innkeepers, seeing the symmetrical lines written by the old scribe's pen, supposed that his customer was struggling with the Muse and ventured to ask him what he was doing.

"Ugh!" hemmed the poet, "my hero gives me lots of trouble; this is the twentieth time I have recommenced one of his great passages; but alas! it is far from resembling the work of the great Cyrano, my model! That illustrious poet's first passage is worth all the most refined thoughts that I have drawn from my brain. Just listen to these lines from his fine tragedy of *Agrippine*."

The old man tragically flung his napkin over his shoulder, made a sweeping gesture, rolled his eyes terribly and, addressing Master Gonin, he cried:

"Non! je la hais dans l'âme!"

"It is Séjanus who is speaking," he explained, in a

gentler voice, which soon resumed its tragical pitch, on continuing,

“Non ! je la hais dans l'âme !  
Et quoi qu'elle m'adore et qu'elle ait à mes vœux.  
Immolé son époux, son frère et ses neveux,  
Je la trouve effroijable ; et plus sa main sanglante  
Exécute pour moi, plus elle m'épouvante ;  
Je ne puis à sa flamme apprivoiser mon cœur,  
Et jusqu'à ses bienfaits me donnent de l'horreur.”

That last line was emphasized in such a way that Master Gonin recoiled in terror.

“How grand that is! How beautiful!” exclaimed the little old man, apparently overflowing with enthusiasm. “Ah! one feels like destroying one's pen; those lines I have just recited are sufficient to rob me of all courage. Give me another measure of wine.”

“My opinion is,” murmured the innkeeper, obeying that order, “that this good man has more taste for Bacchus than for the Muses!”

That reflection, which revealed within Master Gonin a certain literary culture, inspired him with serious respect for his customer. Notwithstanding his principles, the old man ate and drank, and Master Gonin determined to keep him in that mood by flattering his poetical mania.

When the man had quaffed his second measure, his head began to nod on his shoulders; he coughed two or three times, then the cough was followed by a deep snore and the poet-tipler gradually stretched himself out on the bench and disappeared, hidden by the table on which he had dined.

Toward evening, Castillan, newly-attired and mounted on a handsome bay, rode up to Master

Gonin's door. He leaped lightly from the saddle, fastened his lines to the ring affixed to the post at the door, and passed noisily through the hall, making his heels, armed with formidable spurs, ring on the floor.

Scarcely had he cleared the first steps of the stairs when the drunkard yawned loudly and sat up, stretching his arms.

"Ah!" said he to Master Gonin, who was looking at him, "that short nap restored me. I shall continue it in my bed. Give me a candle."

"Would you like some one to accompany you?"

"It is not necessary. I know my way."

Stumbling as he went, he took the candle from the landlord's hands. He tripped upon the first step and notwithstanding that incident which proved him still intoxicated, he cleared the steps quickly enough after Castillan.

A moment later, he was locked in his room, and, stretched upon the floor with his ear glued to the air-cane, ready to listen to the undoubtedly very important conversation to be carried on by Sulpice Castillan and Cyrano.

## XVIII.

"How much?" asked the nobleman, without other preamble, when Sulpice appeared before him.

The secretary understood the meaning of the question, and, employing the same brevity, replied:

"Twelve hundred pistoles."

"Two hundred more than I expected. That Jew is honest."

"He said that if you would sell him the ring, he would give you one-fourth more than the sum he has loaned you."

"Then the jewel is worth a third more. But that is not the question. How much have you left?"

"The horse cost me two hundred pistoles, the suit fifty. That leaves nine hundred and fifty pistoles and here they are."

"Keep two hundred and lock the rest in that drawer."

Castillan divided the money and slipped his part in his pocket.

"Now, my son, impress well on your mind what I am about to tell you," continued Cyrano. "If this accursed wound did not keep me a prisoner, I should be galloping to-morrow over the road to Perigord, and I could have left you here. But I have at least another week of this; to await my recovery to act myself, would be but to prolong poor Ludovic's agony. You must therefore set out in order to gain time."

"What will I have to do?"



"One very simple thing. Carry this letter to my friend Jacques, of whom I have spoken to you so often."

"Ah! I shall be happy to make his acquaintance, my faith!"

"He has a kind heart. It may be that he may at first mistrust you, for I have warned him against all attempts at seduction or violence. But when he will have reflected on the terms of my letter, his doubts will disappear, and as I have pointed out to him, he will set out with you, armed with the valuable trust which I have reclaimed from him, and which neither you nor he can know the contents of."

"Could I not save him a journey and take charge of it myself?"

"You know, my boy, that I am brave, do you not? Well! make no objection. Bravery does not exclude prudence; as I have asked Jacques to accompany you, it is necessary that he should."

Castillan bowed.

"This task, which I entrust to you is not without peril," said Cyrano. "Roland de Lembrat is interested in obtaining possession of the document for which you are going, and he will not fail to put out his spies in order to track us. There may be a struggle, and I do not want to be beaten, even on *your* back."

"Very well, you shall be obeyed in every detail."

"In order to convince you of the importance of this matter, I will say again, my boy, that I shall set out as soon as I can mount a horse."

"You will join us?"

"I will at least come as far as Colignac to meet you."

If you reach there before me, you must wait. I have done. Your hand, Castellan; bid me farewell, for you must leave at daybreak, and I am very anxious to sleep."

The secretary pressed the hand which Cyrano extended to him and withdrew in silence.

Before thinking of rest, he went in search of Suzanne in her room, made her cut open his doublet and insert the letter to Jacques between the lining and the cloth. When Suzanne had again sewed up the secret pocket, the young man kissed her boldly on both cheeks, as a reward for her trouble, and bade her good-bye.

From the head of the staircase, he called to Master Gonin to put his horse in the stable, and flung himself dressed on his bed, as the chimes of the Samaritan sounded the hour of nine.

One hour later, Count Roland de Lembrat, returning from a visit to the Marquis de Faventines, entered his house, escorted by lackeys carrying torches and armed with swords and cudgels, a double precaution taken against the idler rogues to whom Paris belonged at that epoch, when once curfew had rung.

The Count had just retired, when a servant tapped softly at the door.

"Is it you, Blaisois?" called the Count, from his bed.

"Yes, my lord."

"What do you want?"

"There is a man here who insists on speaking to you."

"At eleven o'clock! Let him go to the devil!"

"He pretends that the matter cannot be deferred. It is about M. de Cyrano."

"Light a taper and admit him. But if he is disturbing me for nothing, look out for his bones and for yours!"

Then Blaisois ventured to push open the door, which was only ajar, and appeared holding a lighted candle in his hand.

Behind him, bowing humbly, came the old man whose acquaintance we have already made at Master Gonin's, the poet, the adept of Cyrano, Mathurin Les-cot! He had so pitiful an air, he trembled so ludicrously in his ragged jacket and short breeches, that the Count could not help laughing in the face of the strange personage.

"Granted that I am a good prince, my brave," said he to him. "Try to merit the welcome I am giving you, by telling me something of interest. I am listening."

And as the old man began to tremble again, Roland commanded:

"Speak. Are you afraid?"

The man cast an eloquent glance at the footman who had admitted him.

"What I have to say to your lordship," he ventured at the same time, "must be heard by you alone."

"Blaisois, leave us," said the Count, whose impatience was increasing.

When he found that he was alone with the Count, the old man stood up and in a clear, pleasant voice, said:

"Then I am truly well-disguised, since my lord did not recognize me."

"Rinaldo!" exclaimed Roland, in amazement.

"Myself," said the clever rogue. "You gave me

leave of absence for a day; I have lost no time, as you will see."

"Indeed, is it you?" cried the Count, with difficulty overcoming his surprise. "You are a shrewd fellow, Master Rinaldo, you were transformed in a marvelous manner."

"Was I not?" said the valet, with a smile of satisfaction. "Now, permit me to tell you what use I made of my new skin."

"Speak quickly."

In a few words, Rinaldo recounted the scene at which we assisted.

"I have hold of one of the threads of the plot," he continued, when he reached the description of Cyrano's and Castillan's second interview; "Captain Satan's little clerk leaves to-morrow for Perigord."

"Ah! ah! it is there that my father's paper is."

"Precisely, in the hands of one of Bergerac's friends."

"Did you hear that friend's name?"

"Yes, they called him simply Jacques."

"Jacques?" repeated Roland, racking his memory in vain, for he had never heard of the curé of Saint-Sernin, and did not know about the bonds of affection which attached him to Cyrano.

"Do not mind, my lord; I have said that I hold one thread. He has a letter."

"Addressed to this Jacques?"

"Yes, a letter which Castillan is commissioned to take. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. We must have that letter."

"We *will* have it, and that will help us to find out where Castillan is going, and consequently, where Count de Lembrat's document is to be found."

"But," said the Comt, with a shade of uneasiness, "is there no mention in that letter of matters relative to my father's papers?"

"Bergerac said that the contents of that paper must remain a secret to the man who has it, as well as to Castillan."

"Very well," said the Count, evidently reassured. "It will be an easy matter to get the letter; the little clerk is not the man to defend it."

"If he defends it, so much the worse for him!"

"When does he leave?"

"To-morrow, at daybreak."

"And you?"

"I will follow him or will have him followed. Has not your lordship promised to trust entirely to my judgment?"

"Entirely."

"I therefore would ask Monsieur to give me full and entire liberty to act. I shall have the letter from Castillan and Count de Lennoy's writing, should I have to put all the braves of the *Compagnie Neuf* on the heels of Captain Satan and his party. But," insinuated Rinaldo, softly, "I shall need more money."

Roland opened a drawer full of gold.

"Take all you want. You shall not lack money."

The valet thrust both of his hands into the gold, which glistened in the candle light, and filled a long silk purse with it.

"In a few days, perhaps to-morrow," he concluded, "all will go as we wish, I hope, my lord. You will have the writing you so greatly desire to have, and you will be rid of your enemy!"

"Let there be no imprudence! No blood awkwardly spilled!"

"Rest assured. If Bergerac is killed, it will only be when we have nothing more to get from him.

. . . As for Castellan. . . ."

"Oh! I give him up to you."

"He is small game. We will meet shortly, my lord, keep up hope."

"Adieu, Rinaldo. I shall remember your devotion, and I will see that you are rewarded for it."

Midnight chimed when Rinaldo reached the out-buildings of Hôtel de Lembrat, in which were his lodgings.

He changed his costume, wisely put away a part of his gold and left the place without delay.

The night was dark, but Rinaldo, accustomed to adventures in the dark, walked through the darkness with a firm tread, his eyes piercing it like those of a cat, whose circumspect step he also had, and searched the deepest embrasures of the doors capable of concealing some ill-disposed fellow on the watch for be-lated pedestrians.

He walked along the Seine again without having any annoying encounter, and knocked at the door of the House of Cyclops, dark and silent from base to summit. All activity was not suspended, however, in the interior of the stone colossus, for, at Rinaldo's peculiar rap, the door opened and Ben-Joël's voice asked:

"Is it you, Rinaldo?"

"Who else could it be, at such an hour? His Majesty Louis XIV., who has come to pay you a call, perhaps?"

"You are gay. All must be well."

"You are right. Let us enter."

By the light of the lamp illumining the parlor, Ben-Joël and Rinaldo found their way through the sleepers lying pellmell on the floor, and the two men stole noiselessly to the Bohemian's room.

"Partner," then said the Italian, "it is necessary to speak little and to act quickly. . . . We need for to-morrow, at once, I should say, for day is near, a determined man, an expert swordsman, one skilled among the skilled, in short. Have you such an one?"

"Do you require a swordsman or a dagger expert?"

"A swordsman. Daggers will possibly have their rôle to play, but later on. I desire to accomplish the task as promptly and as discreetly as I can."

"Wait," said Ben-Joël.

He left the room and, after an absence of several minutes, returned, followed by a tall personage, whose singular face deserves the honor of a brief description.

His leanness was almost hyperbolic, but betokened sinew and strength. One could see the elasticity of steel beneath the wrinkles in his skin, tanned by wind and sun; his feet seemed to clutch the ground like talons, and his rigid trunk, affixed to long legs like stilts, was enveloped in an old cloak, ornamented with braid and frayed out laces. A heavy rapier raised the raveled skirt of that cloak and disclosed breeches of greenish velvet spotted with oil, covered with holes and thrust into large boots with worn-out soles.

Above that angular frame-work rose the head of a bird-of-prey. The nose, thin and hooked, drooped over a red moustache, carefully waxed; the eyes, beneath overhanging brows, gave out metallic glints,

and the brow, furrowed with wrinkles and scars, was hidden beneath a fleece of woolly hair of a bright red.

That personage's appearance did not lack a certain natural dignity, contrasting a little, it must be admitted, with the tatters in which he was clothed.

"This is," said Ben-Joël, on presenting him to the Italian, "M. Esteban de Poyastrue, a gentleman of good Provençal stoek, whom hard times and the inconsiderateness of the law have forced to take refuge in our midst. As we came up, I told him a few words concerning our business. If you please, complete the information."

M. Esteban planted himself like an interrogation point before Rinaldo and waited.

"The preliminaries have been gone over," said Roland's valet, "it is useless to touch on them again. Are you the man to pick a quarrel with a young spark and to dispatch him without scandal, my fine fellow?"

"First of all," said Esteban, in an arrogant tone, "I am not 'your fine fellow,' do you hear? When I am spoken to, I am addressed as 'sir.'"

"Sir, then!" agreed Rinaldo without any anger. "Then, sir, you consent, on condition of hire . . . to rid us, honorably, of course, as quickly as possible."

"If the man can defend himself, yes; if not, no. I am not an assassin; I attack to one's face and I kill my adversary according to the rules," interrupted Esteban, brusquely.

"It matters little to me, provided that the result be the same."



"Where is the subject?" asked the bravo, curtly, rapier in hand.

"Peste! you are in a hurry. He will be pointed out to you this morning."

"Where is the money?"

Esteban's brown hand, resembling a gorilla's paw, was outstretched toward the Italian, who slipped into it ten gold pieces.

"More," said the Provençal.

"The devil! you are exorbitant."

Five more pieces fell into the bandit's hand.

"That will do for the present," he replied. "After the affair, you will treble the amount."

And as Rinaldo stared at him in amazement, Esteban added:

"Am I to take it or leave it?"

"I have no time to argue," said Rinaldo. "It shall be trebled, but at least the deed must be done well."

The terrible Esteban looked at Rinaldo without speaking. And his glance was so keen, so coldly resolute, so calmly savage, that the Italian felt a slight shudder run through his frame.

"I see," said he, finally, "that I shall have something for my money."

"You have not told me the name of my adversary."

"His name? What is that to you? It is Castellan; I will undertake to have you meet him several leagues from Paris. You must find a pretext to pick a quarrel with him."

"From now on, you may look upon him as dispatched."

"But," reflected Rinaldo, "we need horses, clothes.

Await me here. In less than an hour we shall be ready for that little expedition."

Roland's valet made haste, and, at the very moment when Sulpice Castellan awoke Master Gonin and ordered him to saddle his horse, the three adventurers had made all their arrangements to surprise him with his foot in the stirrup, to follow him and to overtake him at a spot and at an hour the choice of which Rinaldo had reserved to himself.

XIX.

IT was four o'clock when Sulpice left Paris. The air was fresh, the sky clear; the young clerk filled his lungs with the pure ether; he was glad that he was alive and could roam at will along the high-road, and, as he galloped along, he remembered his master's words, as well as Suzanne's, who, as he mounted his horse, had given him a great deal of good advice.

Caring naught for any danger, Castellan did not notice that he was followed. Five or six hundred paces behind him rode Ben-Joël, Rinaldo and M. Esteban.

The latter was the only one who presented his usual appearance; only his costume was changed, he had put aside his rags to don a close coat of buffalo skin, breeches of green cloth and a very decent-looking, long grey cape, the whole, of course, furnished by Rinaldo.

The bravo's companions would not have been recognized even by their friends. Ben-Joël was disguised as a respectable merchant, traveling comfortably and carrying on his horse the luggage which common pedlars usually load on their backs.

Rinaldo's hypocritical face, metamorphosed besides by the means of skilful after-touches, was half hidden under a large felt hat with silk cords; his cloth suit, simple but of good material, lent him the appearance of some careful provincial steward returning to his estate by short stages.

All three were so different in appearance, each of

their persons bore a stamp so special, that to see them riding along thus, side by side, it never would have occurred to any one that a common purpose might unite them. One would rather have thought that, having met at the outset of their journey, and going by chance toward the same point, the three men had decided to go on together, in order to shorten the time and to make the road seem less monotonous.

Desirous of keeping at a suitable distance, their pace was somewhat less rapid than Castillan's whose attention they did not desire to attract.

Since leaving Paris, not a word had been spoken. Esteban de Poyastruc cast a glance of inquiry at Rinaldo, but Rinaldo persisted in his silence.

After an hour's march, the bravo ventured to ask him if they would not soon stop.

"Not yet," replied the valet.

"There is enough mystery about the killing of this one man!" said Esteban, disdainfully.

"Stupid!" cried Rinaldo. "The little clerk is as well known in Paris as Captain Satan himself. He never leaves him any more than a dog leaves his master. Had we killed him last night, or if we kill him now, the day would not be gone before Bergerac would be informed of it. However, Bergerac must think he is on his way, or else, he might come on and incommode us greatly. We must therefore drive the secretary into some corner, where no one will know who he is, whence he has come or whither he is going. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," replied the Provençal. "But if he continues at that pace, the clerk will take us to Orléans."

"Of what are you thinking, M. Esteban? You will

use your sword at Étampes, I tell you. Twelve leagues is a sufficiently long stretch to make beast and man in need of rest before taking the field again."

"Is there a good inn at Étampes?" asked Esteban.

"I know nothing about it, having never been there. Moreover, we will regulate our choice in accordance with the young man's. I hope he will have the sense to make good choice."

"Bah!" said Ben-Joël, "for the time he will be in the place, it matters little!"

"It matters a great deal!" replied Esteban. "I do not think we will dispatch that innocent at once."

"Why not?" asked Rinaldo.

"Because we will arrive late, because I am very hungry, very thirsty too, and because I only fight without having breakfasted when I am forced to."

"Oh! M. Esteban," sneered Rinaldo, taking in at a glance his acolyte's slender form, "I thought you less material."

"Is that sarcasm?" asked the Provençal, knitting his brows formidably.

"Do not excite yourself," Rinaldo hastened to add. "You may eat, you may drink and you may kill your man at your leisure. But, he has disappeared!" cried the valet, suddenly interrupting himself, and standing up in his stirrups.

Castillan had, indeed, quickened his horse's pace and the three companions had lost sight of him.

A short gallop put them on the track again.

The rest of the journey passed off without any other notable incident.

As Rinaldo had supposed, Castillan made his first stop at Étampes.

Noon chimed when he stopped at the door of the Paon-Couronné and threw his reins to the stable-boy, who hastened to meet him. His intention was to rest there for a while and to set out again at dusk, in order to reach Orléans at one o'clock on the following day. A journey at night did not terrify him, and he calculated that, by virtue of his plan, he would make two stages of twelve leagues on the first day, that is to say almost a quarter of the distance to Saint-Sernin.

Stimulated by the ride he had just taken, the secretary's ordinarily excellent appetite turned instinctively toward the kitchen.

The conditions could not have been more favorable for an empty stomach.

Noon had just chimed, as we have said, and the last strokes of the clock were answered by the creaking of the chains of the turn-spits laden with fowls and with viands, appetizingly cooked by the fire.

"You have come in the nick of time, my young sir," said the innkeeper, greeting the traveler. "One turn more of the spit and the roast would have been spoiled. What would you like?"

"Anything, provided you serve it quickly."

The cook hastily raised the spit and slipped the victuals into an immense dripping-pan, filled with gravy; then, in a trice, he set a table, put a steaming pullet on a decorated platter, and showing Castillan to a seat, said:

"At your orders, sir. There is something to begin on."

Castillan sat down and bravely carved the pullet, whilst the room began to fill with people. In the crowd which the regular dinner hour attracted to the

Paon-Couronné, the military element predominated. Indeed, the inn at which Castillan had stopped was patronized by a certain number of officers and subordinates of M. de Casteljaloux's regiment, then in garrison at Étampes, and in which Cyrano had formerly served as captain.

The tables were almost all filled, when Esteban de Poyastrue entered, followed by Ben-Joël and Rinaldo. The bravo, as had been prearranged, was to play the principal rôle in the bloody comedy about to follow. So he spoke noisily.

"Ho, there," he cried, stopping the landlord on his way, "I want a seat at some table, do you hear, my friend? One seat for me first, then two others for these gentlemen, whom I had the pleasure of meeting on the road and who will not refuse, I fancy, to sit beside me."

The two bandits bowed.

The landlord walked around the room with a doubtful look, then returning to Esteban, he said:

"You see, sir, every seat is taken."

The Provençal pointed in the direction in which Castillan was seated, eating his pallet.

"And that table down there?" he asked.

"To be sure!" the innkeeper hastened to say. "If the young gentleman will consent, your plate can be put beside his."

"It will be strange if he does not consent, after I have asked him."

At those words, Esteban, hat in hand, a smile on his disagreeable face, advanced toward Castillan, before whom he bowed with rather exaggerated politeness.

"Sir," he began.

Sulpice raised his head and, in astonishment stared at the strange personage in front of him.

"Sir," resumed the latter with imperturbable coolness, "you see in me a respectable gentleman pursued by misfortune. I have come to this inn as hungry as a wolf; I have come, moreover, with two travelers who have honored me with their company, and whom I should be happy to treat. But, I cannot find a table that is not occupied, saving yours. I therefore venture to beg you to be kind enough to consent to share it with us."

Having listened patiently to that supplication, Castellan turned toward the two "travelers," whom the Provençal had introduced at the same time as himself, and their appearance did not prepossess him.

However he was too courteous to refuse the request made so politely by Esteban.

"I am happy to be able to oblige you, gentlemen," said he. "The table is large for one; for four it will probably be too small; but that does not matter, we can sit a trifle close. Be seated, I pray you."

"You are a fine fellow," cried Esteban, "and I will drink a bottle to your health."

"To his health!" thought Ben-Joël. "That is what might be called wreathing his victim in garlands."

Thanks to the innkeeper's solicitude, the table was soon set, and by the manner in which Esteban de Poyastruc attacked the repast, his companions soon saw that far from being able to fight before breakfasting, as he had seemed to fear, he might have to fight in a state of intoxication, which caused them not a little uneasiness.

But Esteban deported himself in a manner which



reassured them. The large bumpers he continued to drain seemed to give more firmness to his glance and more clearness to his speech; instead of becoming confused, his face brightened. When the meal was almost ended, he winked his eye at his acolytes, as if to say to them:

“Attention, I am about to operate.”

That signal was not lost to Castillan; and his suspicions were at once aroused.

Cyrano had posted him sufficiently as to the manoeuvres of the Count's hirelings, so that the slightest detail should not pass unnoticed by him, and he had classed M. Esteban's advances under the head of some of those plots.

He rose to leave the room; the Provençal detained him, saying:

“You are not going to leave us thus, I hope?”

“Pardon me,” replied Castillan, “my time is limited.”

“Bah! limited as it is, can you not sacrifice one hour of your time? Before parting let us empty together one bottle of this Canary wine.”

“Very well!” agreed Castillan, reseating himself.

When the wine served in glasses had put one more bond between the four guests, Esteban insinuated:

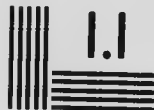
“Pshaw! To drink without doing anything, is fastidious. A dice-box and some dice would serve opportunely to divert us. What do you think about it?”

“I think,” replied Castillan, curtly, irritated by the persistence on Esteban's part in imposing his society upon him, “I think it is high time to think of leaving. Besides, I do not like gaming, and I never play.”



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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The Provençal gnawed his moustache, and in a tone of annoyance, asked :

“That is to say, sir, that you consider my proposition improper?”

“Not at all. I confine myself to regretting that my tastes differ from yours. That is all.”

“That means that mine are bad, that I am a gambler, in plain language. Sir, do you know that you have insulted me?” thundered Esteban, straightening himself up angrily.

“Not the least bit in the world,” replied the clerk, calmly, heeding little the bravo’s irritated air; “on the contrary, it seems to me to be you who are trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

“A quarrel? Zounds, if you dislike fighting as you do dice-throwing, the quarrels picked with you will affect you very little.”

“Surely,” thought Castillan, on hearing that provocation, “de Lembrat is at the bottom of this. It is annoying to begin the campaign with a duel; but, so much the worse! That shabby fellow cannot scare me with his sparrow-hawk’s eyes.”

Reflecting thus, the clerk rose, rested his two hands on the table, and looking the bravo full in the face, he said to him in a mild tone :

“Sir, when will you please to cease this little joke?”

“One word!” cried the other. “Will you play or will you not?”

“I will not play.”

“Then, will you fight?”

“I will.”

The bully bowed.

"I regret," said he, "that our dinner has ended in this fashion, but you wished it so. We will now, if you please, settle this little matter. Have you seconds?"

"I will find them," replied Castillan, looking at the group of officers, who had come up at the sound of the quarrel.

"Will you, sirs, assist me?" asked Esteban of Ben-Joël and Rinaldo.

"Undoubtedly," replied the latter. "We are, this gentleman and I, unaccustomed to such affairs; but we would be unkind to refuse you that favor."

"Let us go."

"One moment," interrupted Castillan, "are you in such haste to fight?"

"The sooner the better."

"It would be better for me this evening, for I have several matters to attend to before our meeting."

"This evening, then. We will fight by the light of a lantern."

"If agreeable to you, I consent."

And Castillan withdrew.

A half-hour later, he had found seconds: two officers of Casteljaloux's regiment, who, at the mere mention of Cyrano's name, had eagerly offered him their services.

Esteban, left alone with his acolytes, looked at them, with a toss of his head.

"Do you know that which I proposed to him?" he asked.

"What?"

"A duel by lantern."

"Well?"

“In order to fight in that way, sirs, one must not be a novice; one must know all the fine points of duelling. I thought you had thrown me with a gosling, but I think I have to deal with a young cock, if I am not mistaken.”

“The devil!” cried Rinaldo, “what if he should kill you?”

The bravo smiled with satisfaction.

“Make yourself easy, my dear. I will show you to-night how to lay an opponent out.”

Castillan spent the remainder of the day in his room, where he wrote a lengthy epistle to Cyrano.

The letter finished, he entrusted it to one of his seconds, bidding him take it to Paris in case he should come to grief, and the officer promised to do as he asked him.

Then the clerk made several thrusts in order to take the rust out of his wrist and seemed satisfied with his trial. A pupil of Cyrano in the art of fencing, he was not at all uneasy in the presence of the danger he was about to meet, and, the thought of that duel by lantern, with the rules of which he was perfectly familiar, and of which Esteban seemed to make so much, caused him but little preoccupation. When the hour of the duel struck, the clerk went downstairs, escorted by his seconds, and met Esteban and his acolytes in the coffee-room.

“I have provided myself with the necessary objects,” said the bravo. “The landlord has loaned us a dark lantern, and I think that my cloak is sufficiently full to be used in the present case.”

“Certainly,” said Castillan. “Come, sirs.”

Behind the inn was a small court, the ground of

which, firm and strong, afforded an excellent spot for the duel.

Here they stopped, each of the parties interested judging wisely that it was not necessary to admit the public into their confidence, nor to brave the law too openly.

Esteban placed the lighted lantern on the ground beside the cloak, and approaching Castillan, said :

“This time, sir, no matter what you think, you must make up your mind to throw the dice against me. It is the way in which we obtain the right of choosing our means of defence.”

“The stake is worth the trouble of changing my mind. Where are the dice?”

“Here they are. Throw first, sir.”

Sulpice took the box, shook the dice a moment and threw them on the ground, in the ray of light thrown out by the lantern.

“Six and two!” he announced, bending over to see the dots.

“Well done!” cried Esteban, gathering up the dice in his turn.

“Four and six!” said he, having played. “Two more than you, sir, I choose.”

With these words, he seized the lantern, after drawing his sword.

Castillan took the cape and rolled it around his left arm.

The duel by lantern was what is called a hand-to-hand duel; it required a great deal of skill, a great deal of strategy, and was often fatal to both adversaries.

The one, armed with the lantern, had now to throw

the light into his enemy's eyes, now to veil it abruptly; for his buckler the other had the cloak which deadened the force of the blows and which he could use, as the Roman used his net, to involve his antagonist in.

"When you please, sir," said Castillan, guarding and standing not sideways, but with chest to the fore, protected by his left arm covered with the cloak, and his body bent slightly forward.

"I am here," replied the bravo.

The light suddenly disappeared; Esteban had just slipped it behind him.

Dense darkness enveloped the combatants, and a fierce thrust, warded off, however, advised Castillan that he was in the presence of a formidable antagonist.

His eyes commenced to grow accustomed to the darkness. He could indistinctly see the bully's silhouette and could feel his sword as if rivetted to his. He elashed the sword, made a rapid thrust and a lunge.

"Well done!" cried Esteban, raising the clerk's weapon with a vigorous blow.

At the same time, a ray of light struck Castillan full in the eyes. Blinded, he retreated, though notwithstanding, he felt the point of the Provencal's sword in his breast.

It was but a slight scratch. The cloak had neutralized the force of the blow.

Esteban had relied so greatly on that thrust that he drew back his sword, expecting to see Castillan fall.

"He is standing, God forgive me!" he exclaimed, after a brief pause.



"To serve you out," replied Castillan, returning to the charge with fury.

The lantern commenced a new game. It began to dance like an *iguise fatous* in Esteban's hand, continually deceiving the clerk as to the bully's true position, now lighting him up from head to foot, now throwing a light at his side, following him, annoying him without end.

He was obliged to reply to those tactics.

Castillan raised his left arm and began to whirl the cloak around in the air, like the immense wing of a night-hawk.

The light flickered, and the Provençal feared it would be extinguished. That must be stopped.

He struck out as if to fell Castillan.

The clerk took advantage of that instant. He struck the lantern one blow with his cloak; it fell from Esteban's hands, and at the same time Castillan thrust his sword into the Provençal's breast.

"Ah!" shrieked the bully, falling heavily on the ground.

And as Rinaldo bent over him, the wretch articulated with difficulty:

"I told you, he was not a gosling . . . but . . . but a cock."

That was all. M. Esteban de Poyastrue was dead.

"Sir," said Castilla to his second, "you may return my letter to me. It is of no use, now."

## XX.

SERPICE had just escaped one great danger : he was not long in falling into another.

Whilst he retired with the two officers who had assisted him, Ben-Joel and Rinaldo held a conference, and a new plan was concocted.

They returned to the inn, where they found Castillan, supping with his seconds.

"Sir," said Rinaldo to him, obsequiously, "what has just taken place can in no way alter the kindly feeling which existed between us this morning. We only knew your adversary from having met him on the road, and we must confess that he was wrong in insulting you in such an unforeseen manner. He was, no doubt, intoxicated; that moment cost him dear enough for you no longer to bear him any ill-will. Pray be kind enough to bear us no malice, and since we are together again, let us get better acquainted."

Before replying, the clerk examined the speaker keenly, and a vague reminiscence re-awoke his suspicions. Rinaldo was sufficiently well disguised not to be easily recognized, but he had been unable to disguise his voice as perfectly as his features, and that voice Castillan had heard ring in his ears at some time.

Discontinuing his scrutiny, he deemed it prudent, notwithstanding, to be upon his guard, and replied, coldly :

"Believe me, sir, that I bear the poor devil no

grudge for allowing himself to be killed, nor you for having supported him on the dueling-ground, but our acquaintance cannot continue, as you wish it to. I shall set out in fifteen minutes, and probably I will not take the same road that you do."

"Who knows? No doubt you are going to Orleans," insinuated Ben-Joel, who up to that time had not spoken.

"Possibly."

"Then, sir, it is a strange coincidence. We are going to Orleans also; we did not expect to leave until to-morrow morning, for the roads are not very safe; but when under your protection, and for the pleasure of your company, we will venture to go with you."

Those words were uttered by Rinaldo with such suavity, that Castellan might have been affected by it, had he not already been warned against travelers' designs.

He knit his brows, and with an air which admitted of no reply, he said:

"Thank you again, sir. I advise you to sleep in peace to-night and to let me depart. I do not need to be escorted, and I particularly like solitude."

"Ah! I can see, sir," rejoined Rinaldo, piteously, "that you cannot forgive us the innocent part we took in your quarrel. Accept our regrets, and may God watch over you."

"Good-evening!" concluded the clerk, brusquely, turning his back to the hypocritical personage, who saluted him by bowing to the ground.

The two bandits retired; but, instead of mounting to their rooms, as Sulpice had politely advised them,

they stole toward the stable, had their horses saddled and left the Faon Couronne by stealth.

"We have lost our auxiliary; we must change our tactics," said Rinaldo to his companion. "Hitherto we have followed the little clerk, it will be better to precede him."

"What is your plan?"

"It is very simple. I intend to send the secretary to join your friend Esteban."

"How?"

"With these."

And Rinaldo drew from their holsters a pair of heavy pistols.

Ben-Joel was arrised in the same fashion. He asked no other questions, having grasped the valet's meaning at once, and the two men urged their horses toward the road to Orléans, which the moon was illuminating with her first rays.

In spite of the entreaties of the officers with whom he had supped, Castellan persisted in his determination; he would set out that very night.

His horse was rested and ready to make another stage of the journey; on the stroke of ten, the clerk leaped into the saddle and galloped through the silent streets. In fifteen minutes he was in the open country, while, before him, stretched like an interminable white ribbon, the road he had to follow to go straight to Orléans.

The moon was shining at its full and guided the traveler, who made his way along as easily as if it were broad daylight.

As far as he could see the plains seemed deserted; he rode on without mistrust, already considering the

events of that day as a sort of dream and gradually losing sight of Esteban in his mind, when a distant neigh interrupted his thoughts.

There was no horse round about.

Castillan, in some surprise, wondered where that sound could have come from.

The road, in that spot, ran through patches of timber, intermixed with dense brushwood, sombre masses, making spots on the light earth.

Evidently, that suspicious neighing must have come from there. Evil-doers were perhaps hidden in the depths of the copse, perhaps Sulpice was about to meet some inoffensive, belated horseman, whom the turnings in the road might have hidden from his sight.

A more prudent man would surely have made up his mind to stop or to turn back, foreseeing some sort of danger; urged forward by his adventurous nature, as well as by the urgency of his errand, Castillan gave his horse the spur, and decided to cross the road at any risk.

At the turning in the road, a shot was heard and a bullet whistled by the ears of Cyrano's messenger.

The clerk thought it best not to face his invisible assailant.

He had to save his strength for a better occasion; consequently, he leaned over his horse's neck and darted off at a full gallop.

A second discharge rent the silence of the night. That shot did not come from the same point as the preceding one; it had been fired some fifty feet further off and, if Castillan had been struck, it could only have been in his breast.

An exclamation answered the sound of the discharge. Then the clerk flung himself backward, while his horse, mad with terror, bore him across the fields at an inordinate pace.

"He is caught," then cried Ben-Joch, issuing from the copse, where he had been in ambushade.

Rinaldo ran toward him.

"Did you hit him?" he asked the Bohemian.

"I think so. I distinctly saw him loosen his hold on the reins and fall on the crupper of his horse which ran away and has probably flung him into some bog."

"Then he is dead."

"Without any doubt."

"Good," said Rinaldo, "but . . . the letter."

"That is true, we must have that. Well, let us hunt our game; he cannot have fallen very far away."

The two murderers leaped into their saddles and rushed away on Castellan's track.

For two hours they searched copse and glade in vain.

No sign revealed to them the presence of or the road taken by him whom he desired to rejoin.

"The devil," said Rinaldo, "this is a hard task. I had rather know my man to be living and to be sure of finding him again, than to think him lying in some hole where he might rot without our discovering him."

"Let us take the road again," advised Ben-Joch. "What use is there in persevering in a useless search?"

"You are right. We must, at all hazards, go as far as Orléans."

The failure of their attempt had rendered the two

wretches very pensive; they rode along side by side without speaking, and in no haste to complete their journey. Perhaps they wished to defer as long as possible the moment when their last hope would vanish.

At about a league from the spot in which they had just executed their project of murder, they saw at their right a large fire, around which ten persons were grouped.

Near the group stood a wagon, and two strong horses.

A third horse was lying on the grass a little further on.

All the shadows stood out darkly in the bright moonlight; our travelers, at first sight, could not tell with what sort of people they had to deal.

The small band were sheltered by a mound covered with low trees; the side of the mound dug out for the purpose of obtaining sand, afforded a convenient refuge. From the summit could easily be seen what was going on in the heart of the encampment, and the personages crouching or standing before the fire could be recognized.

"Partner Rinaldo," said Ben-Joël, "we must not omit one detail. I propose to watch these people."

"I was about to say so to you."

"Let us be prudent."

Combining example with precept, Ben-Joël alighted, muffled his horse's head in his cloak, in order to prevent him from neighing, and led him into a thicket, where he tied him to the low boughs of an ash.

Rinaldo observed the same precautions.

"Await me here," then said he to the Bohemian.

And stealing along the trees, he reached, without being seen, a mass of grey stones, on which the light of the fire, burning a hundred feet further on, was growing fainter.

Arrived there, he could walk with less prudence; he went around the wooded elevation, and, climbing the slope opposite the road, reached the summit in two minutes, from which point he could look into the centre of the group.

Within it, was seated a man, who seemed, for the moment, to be the object of general attention.

An exclamation of surprise escaped Ben-Joël on recognizing Castellan.

The young man's experience can be told in a few words.

Ben-Joël's bullet had really struck him in the middle of his body, but fortunately, on striking him, it had encountered the large copper buckle of his belt, on which it had been flattened.

The shock, however, had been so great that it deprived the clerk of his breath and he fainted.

As we have seen, the horse carried him on a mad course, until, stopped by the light of fire sparkling before him, he halted abruptly, throwing brave Sulpice out of the stirrups.

The clerk had fallen in the grass.

When consciousness returned, he had been carried near the fire and was in the midst of a strange company of men and of women who, at the first glance, he recognized as strolling players.

These excellent people were camping in the open air simply to save the expense of lodgings at an inn.

Sulpice, revived by two or three swallows of whisky,



told his deliverers about his adventure, and, as the showmen were going to Orléans too, it was agreed that the clerk should spend the night with them, and that at daybreak they would all set out for the city.

Having recovered from his astonishment at Castellan's resurrection, the Bohemian began to examine in turn the faces of the company.

In the course of that examination, his eyes rested on a woman, standing at the right of the clerk, and an expression of radiant delight lighted up his face.

"Marotte!" he could not help murmuring, sending a courteous salutation to the woman, although she could not see it.

"Marotte!" repeated the Bohemian. "This time, I am sure of success."

After that reflection, he left his post and rejoined Rinaldo, to whom he related all he had seen.

"Will you let me act?" he added, without giving his partner time to recover from his surprise.

"If you will, we will have Bergerac's letter to-morrow."

"By what means?"

"Hitherto violence has failed us with that accursed clerk. We need something else."

"Well?"

"I have found it."

"You believe we will get the letter?"

"If we do not, I hope that the gibbet on which I shall some day be hung may rise before me, provided with its rope."

"All right! From this moment, I place myself at your mercy. Where are we going?"

"We will remain here; before recommencing the

chase, we must wait until our bird has taken his flight."

The two adventurers stretched themselves in the grass, to watch the movements of the small band.

The strollers' circle was broken.

With the exception of one single man watching near the fire for the general safety, the entire troupe slept, awaiting the hour of departure.

XXI.

"START!" cried the watchman, at the first rays of dawn.

The showmen rose; in a trice the wagon was loaded with all the camping material.

Castillan, still suffering from the severe contusion he had received, mounted his horse, notwithstanding, without much pain, and the entire troupe moved off in the direction of Orléans.

Ben-Joël and Rinaldo left several moments later. The clerk did not suspect their presence. In spite of his first suspicions, he believed them still at Étampes and attributed the attack of the preceding night to common evil-doers.

At the gates of Orléans Sulpice took leave of his new friends who, putting up at a wretched inn in the outskirts, pointed out to their traveling companion, as a lodging more worthy of him, the tavern of the Armes de France, whither the pitiful state of their finances forbade their accompanying him.

The clerk discreetly slipped several pistoles into the hand of the chief of the band in order to repay him for his kind offices and turned in the direction of the large square where glistened the sign of the Armes de France.

The players were scarcely installed in their miserable hovel, when Ben-Joël arrived there.

The Bohemian was alone. He had prudently advised Rinaldo to keep out of the way, hoping to dis-

appear in his turn, when the execution of his plan should be assured.

On entering the tavern, he saw the landlord about to set a long table intended no doubt for the travelers.

"Master," said Ben-Joël to him, without preamble, "do you know those people who have just arrived?"

"Do I know them!" exclaimed the tavern-keeper. "They have stopped at my house for ten years. They always come for the *fêtes*."

"In that case, you are not unfamiliar with the name of Marotte."

"The dancer! Oh! what beautiful eyes she has, sir!"

"You know her well. Where is she at present?"

"In her room. Do you wish to speak to her?"

"Very likely. Where is that room, if you please?"

"But, sir, who are you who ask so boldly to enter Mlle. Marotte's room?"

"Fear not, good man, I am one of her friends and have no designs on her virtue, which I have known of for a long time."

At the word "virtue" uttered by the Bohemian, the tavern-keeper winked his eye wickedly, as if to say that he knew what to think of his lodger's moral temperament.

"On the first floor, the door to the right," he then directed, deeming it useless to offer more objections.

Ben-Joël bounded up the stairs two at a time, and, guided by a woman's voice, he reached Marotte's door.

The young woman was dressing, and while giving a gloss to her black hair, she sang without caring that her light rhymes might annoy her neighbors.

At the first glance, it was easy to recognize her as a child of the gypsy race.

She was dark and her large, fascinating, black eyes, her sensual lips, as red as blood, her quivering nostrils, bespoke her origin.

Her supple, well-developed form was clothed in a woolen tunic, beneath which she wore a dancer's light costume.

She was, indeed, a seductive creature, and although she did not possess Zilla's dignified sculptural beauty, she offered on the other hand the irresistible charm of a savory fruit which leans of itself toward the hand ready to gather it.

Her sportive temperament had earned for her the surname of Marotte (fool's bumble).

Ben-Joël recognized in her a daughter of his tribe, who for a long time had been with a troupe of traveling comedians when he was.

Having watched her for an instant from the threshold of the room, the Bohemian decided to enter.

At the sound of his footsteps, Marotte turned around, and cried joyfully:

"You here?"

"I am, but, sh! do not speak my name."

"Is there a mystery? Whence come you? Where is Zilla? I have heard nothing about you for two years."

"I will tell you about us. At present, there is a question of something else, and if you are in a reasonable enough mood to listen to me without interrupting, I will tell you what I want."

"Wait until I finish."

While Marotte dressed her hair, Ben-Joël carefully

closed the door, sounded the walls to assure himself that they were safe, and then took his seat on a stool near the window.

"There!" cried the *danseuse*, casting a satisfied glance in the fragment of a mirror which reflected her smiling image, "now, you can speak. I am all ears."

Ben-Joël's conversation with Marotte lasted more than an hour.

At the end of that time, the adventurer issued from the room with the air of a man who has just satisfactorily concluded a difficult negotiation.

"Until to-night," said he to the young woman on leaving her. "And above all, do not forget the signal."

"You may rest assured I will not, and leave me now, if you want me to arrive in time."

Ben-Joël vanished discreetly and went in search of Rinaldo, while Marotte, instead of taking a seat at the table prepared for her comrades, got ready to leave the tavern.

Before setting out, she conferred several moments with the chief of the band; then, her head covered with a hood which almost entirely hid her features, and carrying a bundle of clothes in her hand, she turned her steps in the direction of the Armes de France, where, as we know, Castellan was stopping.

At the door of the inn, a groom was saddling a horse, which Marotte quickly recognized as Sulpice's.

The animal, although having rested two hours, still showed signs of recent fatigue.

His hoofs showed the marks of the muddy roads, and his hair, perfectly dry, was pasted in patches on his back.

"Fine beast!" said Marotte, patting the horse with her hand.

"Fine girl!" replied the groom, glancing caressingly at the dancer's features.

"That is a princely steed," said the latter, without noticing the groom's compliment.

"And strong too!" added the man, desirous of sustaining the conversation. "He has made I know not how many leagues this morning, and will reach Romorantin by night."

Marotte heaved a sigh.

"I am going there on foot!" she murmured.

"On foot, why it is twelve leagues, my dear!"

"I know it. Perhaps I may meet some kind person who will offer me a seat in his wagon."

And the gypsy continued on her way, at a rapid gait, as if she were in haste to make up the time lost by that exchange of words.

She passed the gates of Orléans, without slackening her pace, and was soon on the road to Romorantin.

We must not omit to say that on leaving the place d'Orléans, Marotte had jostled against a man standing absently at a corner of the street and had spoken a few words to him in a low voice.

That man was Ben-Joël.

The *dansense* was more than a league from the city, when Castellan decided to set out.

The clock had just struck three; the clerk counted on reaching Romorantin at sunset.

"I hope," he said to himself, as he rode along, "that I shall have no more disagreeable adventures.

A duel and a pistol-shot are enough, I think, to pay for my future peace."

The secretary felt in his doublet and there was the letter inside the lining, the letter, which, for twenty-four hours, he had been unwittingly defending against invisible enemies.

Finding that it was safe, Castillan, relieved of all care, allowed his horse to take him along at his pleasure, and taking advantage of a long ascent the beast was obliged to make at a walk, he drew forth his tablets and began to complete a sonnet begun before his departure from Paris.

As he was trying his puncheon and racking his brain in the pursuit of a fugitive rhyme, a clear voice called him by his name.

He turned his head and saw, seated by the roadside, the young girl whom he had no difficulty in recognizing as having seen the night before by the showmen's fire.

Marotte had thrown her hood on her shoulders, and her head was disclosed to the light; her tiny feet, grey with dust, were crossed one over the other in the grass; her entire attitude bespoke fatigue betrayed in the most bewitching fashion by her languishing pose.

Castillan stopped, as he recognized the dancer.

"Good-day, M. Castillan," repeated Marotte with a pretty toss of her head, and a smile.

"How is it that I meet you here, my dear child!" asked the clerk in astonishment. "Have you left M. Aracan? I believe that is your employer's name."

"It is. Why, yes, I have left him. He is a selfish old fellow. He intended to reduce my share, to his profit, in the money we would earn at Orléans."

"Well?"

"Well, I have a quick temper and an imprudent



tongue; ' called him scrape-penny, and flung my tambourine in his face."

"The result being that you are here without any resources?"

"Not altogether. I am ready to join another company, and, in case of necessity, I can make my living alone, having with me all I need to keep me from want: my *castagnettes* and my *costume de ballet*."

"You are a philosopher, I can see."

Marotte smiled.

"I have to be. When one is nothing, when one has nothing, and when one is going one knows not where, to reach there one knows not when, how would you have one notice the petty trials of life?"

"The *dévil*! That avows that you are altogether ruined and that your destination is very uncertain!"

"Not so much as you think. Now here, I am going to Romorantin and possibly to Loches."

"Ah!" cried Castillan, with a glance of evident satisfaction.

"In one of those two towns there is a company of comedians and of dancers, who will not refuse to engage me, for my name is known to them, by your leave!"

"It is Marotte, is it not?"

"At your service, M. Castillan."

"And you intend to reach Romorantin on foot?"

"Undoubtedly, since I have not the means to ride in a carriage."

"Well, charming Marotte, it shall not be said that a gallant man allowed your tiny feet to perform such hard work. We will ride on, if you please, together."

Here is, moreover, an excellent opportunity for me to repay you for the care you gave me last night."

"I would like nothing better than to accept your offer, but how is it to be done?" ventured Marotte, secretly delighted at the turn affairs were taking.

"It is very simple. I cannot offer you my horse and follow you on foot, for I must make a quick trip. But my horse is strong enough to carry us both, if you will agree to it."

"With all my heart, sir. I will never have had so pleasant a journey."

"Come, then."

Castillan leaped nimbly to the ground, took from Marotte's hands, for, as she talked, she had approached him, the small bundle she carried and flattening it into a cushion, fastened it to the horse's crupper.

"That is perfect," said Marotte. "I shall be like a queen up there. The only difficulty will be to mount your horse, which is as high as a cathedral. You will have to lift me."

"That will be easy; your hand, my dear."

Instead of extending her hand, Marotte unceremoniously flung her two arms around Castillan's neck, and the clerk felt the dancer's warm and perfumed breath fan his cheek, while a velvety glance from the beauty's half-closed lids, penetrated to his very soul.

Notwithstanding his confusion, Castillan lifted Marotte as if she were a feather, and seated her on the cushion prepared for her.

While the adventuress gathered up the reins, the clerk had time to recover from his emotion.

"Stupid that I am," he said, finally, "I did not

think that I should have to sit in the saddle in front. What shall I do now?"

"Must I get down?" asked the charmer, again extending her arms to her cavalier.

"No! wait, I can save you that trouble."

Castillan seized his horse's mane with his right hand, at the side, and turning his back thus to the animal, he raised himself at one bound, without touching the stirrup and lighted on the saddle in a sitting posture. After which he quickly passed his right leg over the horse's neck and was in proper position.

"There!" said he to Marotte. "Hold on to me, if you please, and do not be afraid to hold tight, for we are going fast."

That advice was superfluous.

Castillan had not finished speaking when Marotte's arms were around his body, a living belt which pressed him to her breast.

The situation was dangerous to a heart as inflammable as that of the young clerk.

To ride ten leagues thus, to feel in his ear and on his neck the girl's sweet breath, and above all to feel instinctively the frailness of the vagabondish virtue, was, we must confess, too strong a temptation for Castillan's doubtful stoicism.

"Why not?" he asked himself, after reflecting a long time, an analysis of which reflections we will not undertake to analyze.

"Of what are you thinking?" asked Marotte's playful voice at the same time. "Are you sad, sir?"

"Sad? No," the clerk hastened to reply, "it would be an insult to you."

"You are gallant. Is not this way of traveling

charming? The ride, the air, the sun, all delight the soul and fill you with an inexpressibly sweet emotion. One feels pleased to be living, and one would like to ride thus for hours."

Marotte's hands pressed Castilian's breast a little closer, at the same time they neared his lips by two or three inches.

The clerk could not resist that, and at the risk of twisting his neck, he bent his head and furtively kissed the pretty fingers crossed on the cord on his collar.

"Ah! what are you doing?" murmured Marotte, moving her hands as if to punish the clerk for his impudence.

"Zounds!" cried the latter, "what would you have? One finds a pretty hand within one's reach; one cools one's lips upon it. What more natural?"

"You abuse your advantages, sir. If you do not promise me to be more careful, I will do without your support, at the risk of falling on the road."

"Be very careful. I promise to be prudent."

In spite of his protestations, Castilian could not resist the pleasure of repeating the same offence.

"Come," said Marotte, "you are incorrigible. Since there is no way of getting satisfaction from you, I must treat you as they do children, to whom they give what they are trying to obtain, in order that their fancy may pass away."

At the same time, Marotte's right hand was raised to Castilian's lips and he covered it madly with kisses.

Then, not content with the first conquest and feeling Marotte's brown curls fluttering near his cheek, he turned his head abruptly and put out his lips at a venture, *au jugé*, as the huntsman would say.

The kiss, given so blindly, brushed a corner of the dancer's lips, and she flung herself back, crying:

"Ah! ah! traitor, is this the way you repay my kindness? Then you will lose all in trying to obtain all."

And again Marotte's arms descended from the elevated position they occupied and were clasped on Castillan's breast at an equal distance from his belt and his collar.

"Come," said the clerk, "you are charming, why wish to be so only half-way? Confess that the journey would be monotonous did not one have some loving diversion. Were I to tell you that I am greatly smitten with your charms, what would you reply?"

"I should reply that you were very wicked to wish to deceive a poor girl, for I have had experience, sir, although I have maintained my virtue."

These words were uttered in an ingenuous tone. But Castillan had already gone too far in that adventure to mind those words, contradicted by the adventurer's well-feigned embarrassment.

"Ah! only Marotte of my heart," he cried, "if I did not by ill-chance have to turn my back to you, or, if I had two eyes in the back of my head, you could see that I love you!"

"I have nothing to do with your looks, sir coxcomb. Keep them for others, if you please."

"Accursed situation," grumbled the clerk. "To know that you are near me, and that I cannot see you, cannot drink in your beauty. . . ."

"You are wasting your eloquence, M. Castillan. If you desire to look in my face, moreover, you will have to enjoy that pleasure without allowing your

admiration to cause me to run any risk, for I can see the steeple of Romorantin at the end of the plain, and I will leave you there."

"Ah! corbleu! that is what we should see," cried the clerk, who had certainly lost all caution. "I stop at Romorantin too, and, my dear, I wish to sup with you there."

"Surely, he is mine," thought the dancer, satisfied with her easy triumph.

Then aloud, she replied:

"A supper cannot be dangerous if one takes precautions; we will consider your offer when we alight."

"She is mine," thought Castellan, unwittingly repeating Marotte's reflection.

The clerk did not think he was going contrary to his master's orders, in forgetting, in a gallant adventure, the grave circumstances which were the cause of his journey.

The few hours of which he was about to dispose, belonged to him, he thought, since he could only leave for Loches the following day, and since, in consequence, no scruples concerning his mission would oppress him in the present case.

Moreover, he was not suspicious. He had suspected Esteban and his two companions, men of particularly suspicious manners, but how could he doubt the perfect innocence of a pretty maid, met by chance, and whom no interest attracted to him?

The clerk yielded freely, therefore, to his thoughts, started his horse off at a gallop, and, in less than ten minutes, cleared the distance which separated him from the first houses of Romorantin.

XXII.

WHAT met Castillan's gaze first of all was an inn, situated there to offer a smiling welcome to the traveler entering the town.

Its aspect was gay and inviting; a green branch swung above the door, and on the threshold appeared a chub-faced maid, a tempting sample of the Romorantin people.

Of all the inns that Castillan had successively visited since leaving Paris, that one seemed to him the most respectable and the best kept, perhaps because he came upon it at the very moment when he longed for a place in which to shelter his gallant attentions.

He stopped his horse, directly under the bough which served as a sign for the inn, alighted and caught Marotte as she leaped from the saddle, fearing lest she might escape him.

"Does this place please you, my dear," he then asked, "and will you do me the honor to sup with me here?"

Marotte appeared to reflect gravely, then she smiled:

"We will sup. You are a good fellow, I believe, and I can risk myself in your company. Moreover," she added, with a merry shake of her head, "I am not afraid of compromising myself. It is well known that people do not believe in our virtue."

"We will be cheered up here, then," concluded Castillan, who felt his victory gradually nearing com-

pletion. "Let us think now only of a dainty meal and of doing honor to our landlord's wines, if his cellar is good."

While the clerk had his horse put in the stable and himself saw that he had plenty to eat, Marotte picked up a bit of red tile that had fallen from the roof, and used it to draw on the outer wall of the inn, without being seen by the servant, a very noticeable sign, which presented the form of a triangle, crossed by an arrow, the point of which was directed toward the roof of the house.

When Castellan entered the inn, he found Marotte seated in a corner of the room, before a table, on which she was pressing out with the palm of her hand the rumpled clothes which formed her luggage.

"My girl," said the clerk, addressing the buxom maidservant, "although it is still day and supper-time is not exactly here, you must start the spits going and show us what you know. How long will it take to prepare us a meal?"

"By dark, that is to say, in an hour."

"Very well! Nothing is finer than a meal by candlelight. The candles make the crystal, the wine and lovely eyes sparkle more brightly. What do you think of it, Marotte, my darling?"

"I think there is too much style about that for two travelers' supper."

"Never mind. Ah! my girl," he interrupted himself to catch hold of the arm of the maid, who was going out, "you will serve the meal in my room, if you please. Indeed, where is my room?"

"I will conduct you to it, sir," said the woman.

"Show me to a room, also," said Marotte. "I wish



to make my toilette, out of compliment to my host."

The clerk and the dancer exchanged a smile and a bow and separated until the hour for supper.

The fires were started, the sauce-pans were simmering on the stove, and odors which promised wonders filled the inn, when two men, going at a judicious pace, arrived at the house.

One of them noticed, at once, the red sign drawn by Marotte, and which was lighted up by the last rays of the setting sun.

"They are here," said he to his companion, in a low voice. "Well, this time, I believe we are at the end of our troubles."

And both, turning back without having been seen, hid in the shelter of a ruined wall, which was hard by the road, at some distance from the inn.

A few moments later, when twilight spread its greyish veil over the country, one of the men ventured to raise his head, looked toward the inn and uttered a cry like the call of the owl in the early hours of night.

A window in the tavern opened, the outlines of Marotte's form could be indistinctly seen in the window-frame.

The dancer waved her hand in the direction of the two men, the window closed again, and silence reigned.

Marotte was just finishing her toilette, when the servant knocked at her door, saying:

"Mistress, the soup is steaming, come."

"I am coming," replied the gypsy, casting a final glance in her mirror to assure herself that her arsenal of seduction was complete.

And, following the servant, she entered, radiant, the room where the supper was served and where Castillan awaited her with ill-concealed impatience.

Marotte still wore the long tunic which covered her *costume de ballet*, and the care she had given to her toilette was betrayed simply in the arrangement of her beautiful hair, curled about her temples and held in place by a diadem of sequins.

"To table, my charming one," exclaimed the clerk, hastening to meet his guest, whose hand he took and whom he led to her seat.

Castillan then seated himself opposite her, and the supper commenced. The two travelers were hungry. They forgot, or rather they for the time being put aside their preoccupation, in order to do honor to the dishes prepared by the Romorantin cook.

Toward the middle of the repast, when two partridges flanked with roasted larks appeared, Castillan's eyes, already sparkling from the effects of too copious libations, were raised to his partner with a glance of ardent eloquence.

The clerk evidently thought that the time had come to resume his attacks.

In that, Castillan was like a certain philosopher, who asserts that the heart is subject to the influence of the stomach and that a dainty repast is the best prolegomena of gallant enterprises.

He had not neglected anything to make Marotte fall into the sin of gormandizing.

The lovely woman seemed to enter perfectly into her host's views; she nibbled with her beautiful teeth and drank with a will.

Yet, while Castillan became more and more an-

imated, she did not seem to lose her composure, and a cunning smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"Does it not seem to you, my dear Marotte," said Castillan, after dismissing the maid who had just placed on the table with the dessert, a bottle of wine the color of topaz, "does it not seem to you that we are very far from each other?"

"Very far?" exclaimed Marotte. "You are jesting. The table is small and I can feel your knee pressing against mine, God forgive me."

"Yes, but there is the table, and, small as it is, it is a barrier. Allow me to manage in another way."

As he spoke, Castillan picked up his chair and took his seat beside Marotte.

The girl pretended to recoil, but Castillan's arm was already around her waist, and he essayed to place a kiss on the pretty hand that repulsed him.

"Fool that you are," said Marotte to him, bursting into laughter, "why seek to take that which. . . ."

She stopped, and her fascinating eyes enveloped Castillan in a glance calculated indeed to render him mad.

"Finish," said the clerk, breathless.

"That which would gladly be given you."

And, taking Castillan's head between her hands, Marotte drew him toward her and allowed him to kiss her with a good grace.

"Ah! Marotte! you love me!" cried the clerk, falling upon his knees.

"Have you just found that out, naughty boy?—Do you think that I would have consented to ride behind you, to sup with you, if you had been a common traveler? Lord! how bad men are!"

“Lord! how charming women are!” exclaimed Castillan, rapturously, kissing Marotte’s lovely hair.

Very soon the gypsy seemed to shake off the sort of languor which possessed her, and, pointing to the full bottle and the untouched dessert, she said:

“My friend, now that you have my confession, you no longer fear that I will escape you? Well, let us finish our supper, and drink to our love. Our happiness will lose nothing by it, I fancy.”

“Let us drink!” cried Castillan, utterly bewitched. “And zounds, if I become intoxicated, what matters it? Have you not intoxicated me with your eyes, with your smile, with your sweet voice? You are a demon, I believe, but a demon that holds the keys of Paradise.”

“For me to inspire you with such enthusiasm, you must really look upon me with enamored eyes. Ah! what would it be, good lord, if I had sought to charm you?”

“Do not try: I am burning up, my dear, what could you do more?”

“Would you like me to sing to enliven your dessert or shall I dance?”

“Dance, the idea is charming! In that gown which gives you the appearance of a nun?”

“Oh! no,” said Marotte. “Have you forgotten that I have my professional dress with me? Go and fetch my tambourine from my room; I will refill our glasses.”

While Castillan hastened toward Marotte’s chamber delighted to assist in an entertainment which would add another charm to his adventure, the dancer quickly filled the two glasses, pouring into the clerk’s several

drops of the contents of a crystal vial she drew out of her bodice.

When Sulpice returned, the girl seized the tambourine he brought her, and putting on it a full glass, she presented it to him, saying:

"Drink, my lord and master, to the health of our love!" At the same time, she took her own glass, and held it out to touch glasses with the clerk.

A gallant idea crossed the mind of the latter.

"One instant, my dearest," said he. "In token of union, I wish you would permit me to exchange glasses with you, in order that I may put my lips on the spot where yours have touched."

Marotte turned pale, and the glass trembled in her hand. But she was not the woman to lose her presence of mind on account of so simple an incident.

Controlling herself at once, she smiled and replied:

"Your idea is charming and does you credit . . . unfortunately. . . ."

"Unfortunately?"

"It is too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes, for I had the same thought, and I offered you my glass."

"Oh! Marotte, if you continue in this strain, I shall explode like a powder-magazine!"

"Do not explode, but drink!"

"You are right. To our love!"

"To our love!"

Castillan drained his glass at one draught. Then the sound of clinking glasses was succeeded by the sound of a kiss.

The poor clerk was completely entangled in the charmer's snares.

Marotte took her tambourine and, in a joyous tone, said:

"Now, dear sir, sit down and watch me."

The dancer's thumb struck the parchment of the instrument, and she commenced a sort of *mélopée*, outlining the first steps of a dance or rather of a solemn march, intermingled with slow and majestic movements.

Castillan, with wide-open eyes, stared as if he were in the presence of a supernatural vision.

Soon the *danseuse's* voice became more lively.

The serious mood of her song was followed by a quick and light rhythm; the bells on the tambourine shook with a joyous tremor. Then Marotte paused and with one gesture, dropped her long tunic at her feet.

The clerk was almost blinded.

It was no longer Marotte who was before him, it was a peri, a fairy. He saw her then as he had dreamed of her: as swift, as sportive as a bird, as light as a feather, as voluptuous as a Bacchante.

Marotte saw very quickly the effect she was producing. She began to turn around the clerk, to wave her arms like white wings above Castillan's head, skimming lightly over the floor with her dainty feet, falling at the feet of the young man, and rising again to bound to the other end of the room, then enveloping her victim in a circle of maddening attitudes, intoxicating him with the sight of her, with her smile, her eyes and her song.

Finally the mazy dance ceased. Marotte, her

bosom heaving, her eyelids quivering, knelt before Castillan.

The clerk was more than bewitched. While he saw Marotte's charming form circling around him, as unseizable as a dream, he did not stir from his seat.

But when the sense of reality returned to him, when he saw the bewitching form at his feet, Sulpice opened his arms and rose, in order to seize her like a prey.

Marotte anticipated him, and, laughing sportively, said:

"Ha! I have not finished. Mad is he who would reach me."

At these words, she started off again, as lightly as before. Castillan wanted to pursue her.

He rushed after her, but scarcely did he think he had caught her by the fringe on her scarf, than a silvery burst of laughter from the other end of the room demonstrated to him the absurdity of his efforts.

Speedily the clerk felt that his limbs were becoming as heavy as if a load-stone fastened them to the floor; a singular torpor stole over him; it was no longer Marotte who persisted in whirling before him: all the furniture in the room and the very walls themselves seemed to follow that movement.

Castillan fancied he saw the dancer disappear in a pink cloud, and for an instant he had an intuition of his defeat.

Marotte's clear laughter continued to ring in his ears like irony; he cursed his weakness; he tried to rise from his seat, he beat the air with his arms, and low oaths escaped from his parched lips.

The struggle could not last long. A moment later,

Castillan was asleep on the bed on which he had fallen like one intoxicated.

Pensively Marotte regarded him, and frequently her caressing hand rested on the young man's clammy brow.

Toward midnight, she rose, took a lighted candle and set it on the window-sill.

Several instants later, the sound of gravel thrown against the panes broke the silence of the night.

Marotte softly opened the window, having first extinguished the light, and two men, hauling themselves up by the aid of a rope fastened by the gypsy girl to the cross-bar of the balcony, entered the room.

Those men were Ben-Joël and Rinaldo.

The latter carried a dark lantern, the light from which he turned on the bed.

"Is he asleep?" Ben-Joël asked at the same time.

"He has been asleep almost two hours," replied Marotte.

"You have served us well, little one. Now, come on."

And Ben-Joël drew his dagger out of his belt.

"Are you going to kill him?" asked Marotte, shuddering.

"That is a fine question! What can that matter to you, I pray you?"

"This! I do not wish it," replied Marotte, resolutely.

"You are mad. This fine gallant must die. He annoys us; therefore, let us act."

"No!"

"Stubborn girl!" murmured Ben-Joël.

Rinaldo said nothing, but he grasped Marotte's arm. The dancer freed herself from his restraining fin-



gers, ran to the bed and, drawing from her bosom a dagger which she always carried there, she threatened:

"Come now, if you dare."

"We are losing time," remarked Rinaldo.

"Do not approach," advised Marotte, seeing de Lembrat's valet about to advance; "I warn you that a wound made by my dagger is mortal."

"Strange girl!" murmured Rinaldo, retreating prudently.

"Well, Marotte," replied Ben-Joël, "are we to believe that you love that Parisian?"

"Who knows?" said the dancer. "Go, bandits, if you wish to demand more than I promised."

"You require his life . . . absolutely."

"Absolutely."

"She will not give in," sighed Ben-Joël. "Come, Rinaldo, we must leave as quickly as possible."

\* \* \* \* \*

When the rising sun kissed Castillan's face, the clerk awoke with difficulty, and, still dazed from the effect of the narcotic given him by Marotte, he sought to collect his thoughts. The reminiscences of that night, commencing at a well-spread table, ending in an overwhelming dream, gradually re-occurred to him.

He sat up and looked about for the Marotte whom he had seen disappear in a cloud.

A bit of ribbon, lying on the floor, alone betrayed the sportive maiden's passage.

Castillan sprang out of the bed and found that he was ready to go in search of information, for he had slept in his clothes.

When he tied his doublet, which he had opened that

night to get air for his throbbing breast, an exclamation of surprise and of anger escaped him.

Instinctively he felt the place in his garment in which Suzanne had sewn the letter from Cyrano to the curé of Saint Sernin, and that place he found empty.

The lining of the doublet was cut, and the valuable letter was no longer there.

XXIII.

THAT discovery plunged Sulpice into a profound stupor. When he recovered his self possession, he thought seriously of blowing out his brains in order to punish himself for his infidelity.

He cocked one of his pistols and began slowly to put it to his head.

The weapon fortunately stopped on the way, and Sulpice, having probably reflected, replaced it on the table.

"What a fool I am!" he then murmured; "if I were dead, things would be no better; on the contrary, I must live and try to repair my folly."

His first thought was to return to Paris. That plan, however, was not the best. While he would be riding to the capital, his enemies would reach Saint-Sernin and the wrong would become irreparable.

He was beginning to look at the adventure from that point of view, when the maid of the inn rapped softly on the door.

Sulpice opened it hastily.

"Where is she?" he asked of the newcomer.

"Who, sir?"

"Marotte; the lady with whom I supped."

"She has been gone some time, sir."

"Gone! In what direction?"

"In the direction of Orléans!"

"The accursed wench!" growled Castillan. "She has robbed me. But why? I wonder vainly."

The maid took from her pocket a daintily folded note and handed it to Sulpice, saying :

“That is for you, sir.”

“From whom?”

“The pretty lady.”

“Ah! Let me see.”

Castillan opened the note, written in a sprawling hand, and read these words :

“Ben-Joël has gone to Saint-Sernin. Forgive me; I repent.”

“Ben-Joël! Ah! Now, I understand all,” cried the clerk.

Adding with a burst of anger :

“She repents, the jade! It is time, indeed, my faith! She inveigles me like a sparrow in her snares, she ridicules me, she makes me drunk, she robs me, and after that she asks my pardon! Who would have thought it? Marotte in connivance with those knaves! Ah! I would crush the race of Bohemians beneath my heel. I escaped all dangers, all ambushes, and a damned female got the best of me. But, by the devil! That shall not be allowed. I will regain possession of my letter, should I, in order to do so, have to rip Ben-Joël open from stomach to throat. Go, my girl, have my horse saddled, and find me a messenger who can leave for Paris instanter. There will be twenty pistoles for him if he reaches there before to-morrow night.”

“He can be found, sir,” replied the servant. “Claude Morel will undertake it.”

“Run quickly, then, and bring him to me.”

While the maid withdrew to execute Castillan's orders, the latter wrote the message destined by him

for Cyrano, a message in which he briefly enumerated the facts which had just taken place.

He did not seek to excuse himself; he relied on Cyrano's character and knew him to be a man who would not suspect his good faith.

When the letter was finished, Castellan went downstairs and found Claude Morel awaiting him.

The terms were speedily made; Sulpice saw his man depart, and, satisfied on that point, he in his turn swung himself into his saddle, and galloped off in pursuit of Ben-Joël whom, at any price, he must prevent from reaching Saint-Sernin.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the scene of the preceding night, Marotte, it must be said, was ashamed of the part she had been made to play, since at the last moment she had betrayed her accomplices' cause in order to enlighten Castellan as to their plans.

She had remained with the two companions only long enough to discover their projects and had set out again for Orléans, not without cherishing the hope that some day or other she might meet Castellan and might make him forget her treason.

As for Rinaldo and Ben-Joël, they had separated after determining on their course.

Ben-Joël turned his steps toward Loches, and Rinaldo took the road to Paris, where he arrived on the morning after the following day, without hastening greatly.

When the rogue presented himself at Hôtel de Lembrat, the Count had not yet risen, although it was almost eleven o'clock.

Roland, having spent the night at a ball, had slept very late, and was very much provoked at the coldness shown him by Gilberte de Faventines.

He was, therefore, ill-humored when his servant entered with the announcement of Rinaldo's return.

The name of the latter, uttered in a discreet tone by the man, had the effect of suddenly quieting him.

"Rinaldo here!" he exclaimed, "what can have happened? Admit him."

Rinaldo had not awaited permission, he was already in the room.

"Well?" the Count inquired, on perceiving him, "what have you come to tell me? The letter?"

"We have it, my lord."

The Count breathed more freely.

"Give it to me," said he.

"You want the letter?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But I have not it, my lord."

"Where is it then, stupid?"

"In Ben-Joël's hands."

"And Ben-Joël?"

"Is traveling now in the direction of Saint-Sernin."

"This requires explanations."

"I have come to make them, my lord."

Rinaldo then related all that had happened. When he had told how Marotte had defended Castellan's life, and how also, notwithstanding, she had found the letter sewn in the traveler's coat and had given it to them, the Count cried:

"She fell in love with the secretary suddenly, then?"

"Woman is a strange animal, my lord! We thought

as you did, but we lacked the leisure to inquire into it."

"That, however, matters little to us. What did the letter contain? To whom was it addressed?"

"To M. Jacques Longuépée, curé of Saint-Sermin, in Perigord."

"I understand! Some friend of Cyrano's."

"His foster-brother, my lord. The letter contained many protestations of affection and ended with several remarks relative to the Count's, your father's, document."

"Let us hear that."

"According to Cyrano's orders, the curé was to place the greatest confidence in Castillan, to provide himself with Count de Lembrat's papers, and to set out with the said Castillan, and to await Bergerac at Colignac."

"A great deal of precaution. . . . And," continued the Count, with some hesitation, "was there nothing relative to the contents of Count de Lembrat's document?"

"Nothing, my lord."

"Well," said Roland to himself, "Cyrano has at least kept the secret to himself."

"My lord," concluded Rinaldo, "the rest of the affair is simple. Ben-Joël, who is a very prudent fellow, is on his way this very moment to the curé of Saint-Sermin, where he will present himself under the name of Castillan. Bergerac's letter will not cause the good curé to mistrust the messenger, and when Ben-Joël will have seen but the end of the envelope which encloses your father's writing, you may be certain it will not be long before he will be in possession

of it. That told, my lord, are you satisfied with us?"

"You are an excellent servant, Rinaldo. The day on which our success shall be complete, will see you the owner of the land which adjoins my castle of Gardannes, and which your father farmed."

"Oh, you do things royally, my lord!" cried the valet, whose eyes sparkled with satisfied cupidity.

"Go, now, and try to find out what Cyrano is doing, for they say he is convalescent from his wound."

"You shall be informed in two hours, my lord."

Count de Lembrat dressed, while Rinaldo went in search of information, and was about to order his carriage that he might go to the Marquis' house, when his accomplice returned very unexpectedly.

He had been gone scarcely an hour.

The valet's face was nonplused.

Roland foresaw that he was about to hear bad news.

"Ah! my lord," exclaimed Rinaldo, "if you knew what had happened!"

"What, knave? No preamble, I pray you."

"Well, my lord, I have been to Bergerac's."

"Well?"

"The bird has flown."

"Since when?"

"Since last night!"

"Where is he?"

"I cross-questioned his landlord, who is a great gossip, and he informed me. . . ."

"He informed you?"

"That a peasant, coming from Romorantin, had been to Cyrano's lodgings last night, and had brought him a very important letter. Upon which, Cyrano,



without listening to any remarks, ordered his horse and left Paris immediately. He has surely gone to Castillan's aid, for I will wager that Castillan had something to do with that letter."

"And you wager aright, imbecile. If you had rid us of the secretary, we would not have the master on our hands at this time."

"But, my lord. . . ."

"Be silent, with Cyrano gone, all is recommenced, and, who knows, now, if I will not be the victim of your absurd conduct and if the de Lembrat document will not escape us?"

"We will have it, my lord, I swear to you, as surely as I will have my farm at Gardannes."

Rinaldo said "my farm," as if he were already sure of his success.

Roland was somewhat reassured by the valet's manner and dismissed the man, saying:

"Well, go, do what you like; I give Cyrano up to you. As for me, I will attend to Manuel. It is he, after all, who is the principal cause of all this trouble, and if he were dead, I should care very little for Bergerac's annoyances. I will think over that. I care not when Cyrano returns!"

When he was alone, he added:

"They can force me to recognize Manuel as my brother, but they cannot prevent me from taking his inheritance from him. What it is to have scruples. If I had thought of this sooner, instead of a stone prison, Manuel would have had four boards for his shelter."

Having reassured himself thus, the Count forgot his first plan in order to devote himself entirely to Manuel's ruin.

While Rinabdo hastened to leave Paris, in order to try to rejoin Cyrano, and while Castellan followed Ben-Joël, Count de Lembrat also took the field.

His first visit was to the provost, Jean de Lamothe, who with great zeal was watching Ludovic's case.

Meanwhile the young man was kept a prisoner in one of the smallest cells of the *châtelet*.

"Well, my dear provost," said the Count; "where are we in this serious matter?"

"We are advancing slowly; but the slower the law the surer it is. What has become of Master Cyrano?"

"I do not know," said Roland, indifferently. "We have been somewhat at variance since his *protégé's* misadventure."

"I understand that Bergerac thinks himself infallible; he bears ill-will toward those who try to correct him for that self-confidence."

"You are right in your opinion. *À propos*, my dear provost, I must ask a favor of you."

"What is it?"

"I would like to see this Manuel."

"What a strange fancy!"

"No. It is not a mere fancy, I assure you. Does he persist in his pretensions?"

"More than ever."

"Well, I flatter myself that I can make him return to more modest ideas. Can you grant me the warrant I ask of you? And would it be possible for you to extend that authority to another person whom I should deem proper to introduce near the prisoner?"

The provost wrote several lines on a sheet of vellum, and, handing the writing to Roland, he added:

"With this, you can enter into Manuel's prison without any trouble, and the person whom it will please you to point out to the jailer will also be admitted to the *châtelet*."

"Thank you, my dear provost, after to-day, I will use your signature."

"In eight days, if God pleases, my search will be ended. The mass of proofs which I have in my possession seem to me sufficient to force a confession from the culprit. If, however, he does not yield, I know of one means to make him decide to."

"What is it?"

"Torture, my dear Count. Good iron boots fastened to his feet, or some other means I know of are arguments which the most hardened do not resist. Farewell."

## XXIV.

ROLAND had only a few steps to take on leaving the provost's house, in order to reach the gate of the *châtelet*.

He showed his order to the jailer, and all the gates opened before him.

A turnkey preceded him and took him through a long, dark corridor, at the end of which was a narrow staircase leading to the subterranean part of the prison.

The two men descended thirty steps.

After which the jailer, pausing before an oaken door, shook his bunch of keys, and said to the Count :  
"It is here."

The bolts slipped, the key turned slowly in the lock, and the Count, through the opening in the door, could see an indistinct form crouched on a stone bench, in the shadowy cell.

Manuel did not turn his head on hearing the sound of the door; he was used to his keepers' daily visit, and he allowed them to do their duty without even addressing a word to them.

Recent as had been the young man's captivity, it had greatly changed him.

His naturally pale face had assumed the shade of ivory; his temples and his cheeks were sunken, and his eyes glowed as if burning with fever or madness.

He had suffered cruelly during those few days, suffered in mind rather than body, for he was supremely indifferent to his material situation.

Had he not, moreover, been reared in the school of suffering and privation?

What bowed his head, what broke his strength, was the sense of his disgrace, the remembrance of Gilberte, lost to him forever.

He was there, his face hidden by his tangled hair, and insensible to the horror of the darkness which surrounded him as well as to the dampness which penetrated to the marrow.

Not seeing him stir, the turnkey laid his hand on his shoulder. Manuel turned around slowly.

"Does your lordship wish to be left alone?" then asked the man.

"Yes," replied Roland, in a low voice.

At the sound of his brother's voice, Manuel started and glanced at the visitor, whose face was dimly lighted up by the light from the air-hole.

"You, here!" he exclaimed, rising as if to rush toward Roland de Lembrat.

The latter instinctively retreated a step. He was afraid of that movement made on the spur of the moment.

"Fear nothing, sir," the young man said bitterly.

"You can see that I am chained."

Then Roland saw that Manuel's right foot was held by a heavy, short chain fastened to the floor of the cell.

He signed to the turnkey to retire and again approached Manuel.

"If you expected a visitor, it was not I, was it?" he asked.

"Why not?" replied Manuel, coldly. "Probably you have come here to assure yourself that I am guarded closely enough."

"You are mistaken. I have come here to find out if you wish to leave here."

"Liberty! *You* offer it to me!"

"Does that surprise you?"

"Nothing surprises me now. And the word liberty, you hear, I can repeat in a calm voice, knowing well that you uttered it as one throws a bait before a snare."

"You have a very poor opinion of me, Manuel?"

"Is it in my power to have a better, sir? Explain your intentions freely."

Roland drew a purse from his doublet.

"There is here," he said, "quite a sum, almost a fortune to you who have always known poverty, Manuel, consent to fly, to leave France, and I will give you this fortune."

"That was not clever," sneered the prisoner, cruelly. "And if the provost had heard you, the words alone you have just uttered would be sufficient to ruin your cause."

"I do not understand you."

"What? You believe me guilty of a crime, you accuse me of having stolen your brother's name, my condemnation seems inevitable to you and you come here foolishly to offer me money in order to rid you of my presence! But that, sir, is simply an avowal that I am Ludovic de Lembrat and that you fear the knowledge of the law."

Roland bit his lips. The prisoner's logic put to naught a plan which he had believed cleverly conceived. To persuade Manuel to flight was, indeed, to convince the public and the judges of his guilt. A man strong in his right would not flee from the suit

which menaced him. He would struggle to the end; he would protest to the scaffold.

Some reply must be made to Manuel's objection.

The Count said:

"The law is formidable for you, Manuel."

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders.

"Then find a reason which can justify your offer.

You cannot think of one, can you? Let us, therefore, leave matters as they are, sir. I know what my fan't is,—and I am expiating it here,—it is that I love the woman you have chosen."

"Do you think so?"

"I think that your injured love alone has inspired you with the plot of which I am the victim. It is for that that I pity more than scorn you. Passion is mad, it will go even to the extreme of infamy to assure a rival's destruction."

Manuel was more charitable toward his brother than he deserved.

! as not disposed to believe that base enpidity was the chief motive of his conduct.

And, as Roland remained motionless and mute, the prisoner concluded:

"Go, sir, go without fear; I can no longer contend with you for your betrothed, but you cannot take from me my love as you have taken my name. I love Gilberte, and my revenge is the thought that the pure maiden's soul, closed to you, was one day opened wide to me, and that it revealed to me all the exquisite treasures of her affection."

"Wretch!" roared the Count, exasperated at those words.

"Would you strike me?" asked Manuel, coldly.

"You may. I have told you, I believe, that I am chained."

Roland controlled himself.

He had, moreover, learned all that he desired to know, he was assured of Manuel's firm resolution, and the fear with which Cyrano's threats inspired him, was increased on seeing, at the last moment, the judge's conviction weakened, perhaps destroyed by the firm attitude and formal declarations of the accused.

"Well," said he to himself, on leaving the cell, without addressing another word to the prisoner, "that step has put an end to my indecision. This Manuel is decidedly in the way here."

Roland, before leaving the *châtelet*, said to the turnkey:

"M. Jean de Lamothe's order has given me authority to send to Manuel some person I may please to select, if I have need to communicate with him and cannot come myself."

"Indeed, my lord."

"Soon, to-morrow, perhaps this evening you will receive my envoy's visit. Whosoever it is, he will be furnished with a line from me, and you will have to look upon him as another Count."

"We will obey the provost's and your orders, my lord."

When the Count was once more in the open air, he drew a deep breath.

The excitement of the scene just enacted had oppressed his breast more than the unhealthy atmosphere of the prison.

"Let me see," he said, to himself, walking slowly, with an irresolute air, "what shall I do?"



Suddenly his face lighted up.

"Zilla," he murmured.

And his step grew more rapid and more assured.

The Count had made his choice.

He crossed the Seine and proceeded toward the House of Cyclops, where, for several days, Zilla had been living alone, knowing nothing of the real reasons for Ben-Joel's absence.

The gypsy, moreover, cared little about his absence; all her thoughts were for Mannel, for Mannel, whom she loved and whose fall she had welcomed as the most favorable issue of her love.

She hoped to see him return soon, humble and disillusionized, to Ben-Joel's roof; she was prepared to console him, to heal him, to offer him tender reality for his dreams.

But she waited in vain, Mannel was still in imprisonment; she had had no news of him; she could turn to no one for it.

For whole days, she remained in her room lost in thought, and, at times, starting at the voice of her conscience, which reproached her for her selfishness and her treason.

No one had come to interrupt her solitude. So, when a human footstep was heard on the worn-eaten staircase of the old house, Zilla rose, her bosom heaving, her lips parted, her eyes sparkling with passion.

She hoped for Manuel's return.

It was the Count who appeared on the threshold of the door which the girl had opened in her impatience.

A shade of sadness clouded Zilla's brow.

Nevertheless, she felt pleased to see the Count. Through him she would hear something about Manuel,

through him, perhaps, she might learn of his approaching release.

"Ah! sir," she cried, "you have come to tell me what is going on, have you not?"

"My dear," said Roland, flinging himself on a seat, "I have come especially to talk to you, and I ask nothing better than to answer your questions."

"Where is Manuel?"

"In the *château*, still."

"His trial?"

"Is being prepared."

"Did you not promise me, sir, that the affair should have no results, and that after confounding Manuel, you would . . . pardon him?"

"I promised all that, it is true, for I could see your true feelings; unfortunately, the provost, having promised nothing, did not take the matter as simply as I believed he would. He desires a trial and a sentence."

Zilla turned pale.

"You laugh, sir," said she, in a trembling voice. "The time is ill-chosen, it seems to me."

"If I laugh, my dear, it is because your . . . friend is not in danger."

"You think so?"

"I think it will not be necessary to await the trial, and that the bird could perfectly well fly, now."

"Who will give him the means? The *château* is well guarded. Who will open the doors for him?"

"I."

"You?"

"Undoubtedly; if, however, you will aid me in this enterprise."

"Speak! What shall I do?"

"My dear Zilla," said the Count, slowly, "I have no need to remind you that you are the prime cause of Manuel's captivity. It was you who enlightened me as to his deceit; not in my interest, but in yours, I fancy. You loved him, and you saw that he was lost to you. . . ."

"What are you driving at?" interrupted Zilla, curtly.

"At this: your hand was the instrument of his ruin, it must be the instrument of his salvation. Write to him; tell him of your repentance; offer him liberty. A man will undertake to deliver your letter to him and to prevent it from being seen. We must have the blindest confidence in such a man. Do not forget to tell this to Manuel."

"Yes," said the gypsy, with conviction, "you are right. I alone should write to him. And he will believe me, for I will tell him the whole truth."

"Love has no need of excuses. You will be speedily pardoned. Write; I am waiting."

Zilla seated herself and took up a pen after reflecting an instant.

Beneath her feverish hand, the vellum was rapidly covered with strange characters. The girl wrote in the Romany tongue, the dialect of the nomadic tribes, which language Manuel had learned to speak in childhood.

When the Count saw that she was entirely absorbed in her work, he began to walk about the room slowly, examining closely the most mysterious corners.

Evidently the Count was looking for something. His eyes soon fell on a table laden with objects of all sorts and standing to the right of Zilla.

He advanced softly, extended his hand without being seen by Zilla, and seized an object on that table, which he slipped hurriedly in his doublet.

"Have you finished?" he then asked, approaching the fortune-teller.

"Yes. See."

She held out to him the carefully folded note.

"Very well," said the Count. "In less than two days, you will have nothing more to fear; Manuel will be safe from everything."

A peculiar smile accompanied those words.

Zilla did not notice the expression of Roland's face. She clung to a new hope, and her eyes, accustomed to read to their very depths the thoughts of her interlocutor's, were at that moment as if blinded by the radiance of an approaching happiness.

"That Zilla," thought the Count, as he returned home, "that Zilla was caught in my trap like a real linnet. If she but knew that through her again I possess the means of ridding myself of Manuel!"

And rolling the gypsy's note between his fingers, he entered his room and put away carefully the object stolen by him from Ben-Joël's sister.

That object so skilfully stolen by the Count, was a vial of poison.

One day when Roland and Ben-Joël were conferring in Zilla's room and were talking of Cyrano, the Bohemian had said to him, pointing to the vial:

"See, sir, there is something more to be dreaded than Captain Satan's sword. One drop of the liquid contained in that bottle would kill a man in two seconds."

At the time Roland had not paid much attention to

Ben-Joël's proposal, who took a sort of pride in explaining to the Count the strength of the weapons he used.

He had seen him take up and replace the tiny vial on the table, without having had the least desire to possess it.

On leaving the *châtelet*, the remembrance of that incident had occurred to him, like an inspiration. From that instant, his resolution had been made. On entering Zilla's abode, he did not intend to buy the poison of her: that would have been to reveal to her his plans.

He wished simply to steal it, and he had succeeded. The letter with the thought of which he had inspired Zilla would facilitate him with the means of accomplishing the theft, by occupying the girl's attention; it would undoubtedly help him to use the object of that theft and become the innocent cause of Manuel's ruin.

The gypsy did not know until night of the real object of the Count's visit.

That night, before retiring, Zilla, very careful of her beauty and very skilful, like all the daughters of her race, in the art of preserving it and of increasing its brilliance, Zilla, we say, sought among her vials for an ointment which she was in the habit of putting on her cheeks and lips.

She immediately noticed the disappearance of the tiny glass bottle containing the poison, boasted of by Ben-Joël. That discovery troubled her greatly.

Pushing back with her hand the toilette articles she was about to use, she began a careful search for the dangerous product, too imprudently left within the reach of the indiscreet.

When the uselessness of her search was entirely demonstrated, Zilla felt her trouble increase.

Then a thought occurred to her.

"The Count!" she cried, "it is the Count who has stolen my poison. Ah! fool that I am! I believed in his sincerity. He wishes to kill Manuel and he came to me, to me, to steal his weapons. Hypocrite and coward! I knew him well, and I allowed myself to be deceived!"

Zilla, beside herself, threw her cape over her shoulders, over which floated her loosened hair, rapidly descended the staircase and left the House of Cyclops.

"Where are you going, my dear?" called the old portress to her as she passed on; "it is very late to be on the streets."

Zilla did not hear her.

She rushed out into the night, and walked rapidly toward the Pont-Neuf, where for several hours silence had succeeded the bustle of the day.

XXV.

ABOUT a week after those events, Cyrano had been installed for twenty-four hours in the town of Colignac in the house of the lord of the place.

His host was also the friend of his childhood, his name was Count de Colignac.

Savinien, pressed as he was to rejoin Castillan, of whom he had not had any recent news, did not wish to pass by Colignac without greeting that friend.

Moreover, it was at his house that he had appointed a meeting with Castillan and Longuépée. He was not very much surprised not to meet them there.

His trip had been very quick, and he supposed that Castillan, in view of the complications caused by Ben-Joël, was delayed on his way.

Savinien was not uneasy. He knew Longuépée capable of defending alone against the Bohemian Count de Lembrat's precious trust.

He therefore did honor gaily to Colignac's sumptuous fare.

Since the night before, Savinien, habitually as sober as a cenobite, had not left the table. The Count and his neighbor, the Marquis de Cassan, great huntsmen, great drinkers, forced him to stay with them.

While the three gentlemen were thus gaily spending the early hours of the morning, a man arrived at Colignac and engaged lodgings at the best inn in the town.

That man was Rinaldo.

The knave had lost no time. From Paris he had followed on Savinien's track and had made up the start that nobleman had over him.

The valet had undergone another change. He appeared at the inn, dressed in black from head to foot, and his face, at once grave and mysterious, gave the tavern-keeper, accustomed to the round faces of the peasants of Perigord, food for thought.

Rinaldo took him aside and whispered several words in his ear.

The man opened his eyes wide on hearing the traveler's confidence, and his respectful manner showed those drinking in the room, that they had before them a person of consequence.

Shortly afterward, Rinaldo went to his room, accompanied by his host.

At the end of an hour the two men again descended the stairs. The proprietor of the inn returned to his work; the traveler left the inn and turned toward the house of the bailiff, representing royal justice.

The curiosity of those at the inn was excited. Who was the man in black, and what was he doing at Colignac?

"Ho, there! Landriot," finally cried one of the peasants, less patient or more indiscreet than the others, "come here a minute."

Master Landriot, that was the innkeeper's name, approached.

"What do you want?" he asked of him who had called him.

"I wish to ask you since when you have grown mysterious with your friends, you who are usually as much of a chatterer as a magpie?"



"Mysterious?"

"Undoubtedly. Who is that fellow with the Shrovetide face whom you salute so low and who steals like a shadow along the lanes in order to go to the bailiff's house?"

"That is nothing to you, curious fellow!"

"You are very discreet, or else you know nothing."

"I know nothing!" cried the landlord, visibly piqued at the doubt expressed by his interlocutor.

"If I had not promised to be as silent as a carp, you would see if I know nothing."

That declaration, accompanied by a smile of importance, had the immediate result of gathering all his customers around him.

They scented an interesting story, and they wanted it at any price.

"If you have promised to be discreet," ventured another personage, "we are capable of being so as well as you. The devil! one can easily confide a secret to one's neighbors. Come, tell us what you know about the man in black."

"But. . . ."

"Yes, speak," cried the assembly, with one voice, goaded by ever-increasing curiosity by reason of Landriot's excessive reserve.

"I have promised."

"But, stubborn fellow, when we repeat to you that we will say nothing. . . ."

"Will you swear it, sure?"

"Sure."

"If you betray my secret, you see, it might do me harm."

"Will you speak?"

“Well, since you promise to say nothing. . . .”

“Yes?”

“Not to seek to annoy my traveler. . . .”

“Yes! yes! Are you satisfied?”

“I will tell you all. Oh! it is terrible!”

The circle pressed around Rinaldo's unfaithful confidant, who lowered his voice and held his hand to his lips to say to his auditors:

“Do you know who the man in black is, my boys?”

“He is? . . .”

“A police officer from the Paris provostship. Nothing but that!”

“A police officer!”

“Psh!” said the narrator. “If you scream thus, I can say nothing more. That officer, who, as you know, is a man of great importance, commissioned to execute the King's laws, that officer has come here in pursuit of a criminal, of an agent of hell, of a sorcerer, since it must be told.”

These words rather troubled the auditors. The peasants looked at one another fearfully and their eyes wandered instinctively toward the corners of the room, as if they expected to see rise there the menacing form of the sorcerer mentioned by Master Landriot.

At that time, and especially in the remote provinces, a sorcerer was the greatest of terrors to the ignorant people, and it did not take very much to change the most innocent man into one who cast fates and a frequenter of nocturnal meetings.

The most enlightened minds had preserved in that respect the prejudices of another age, and they frequently burned on the public square persons suspected of having had intercourse with the Evil One.

When calmness was restored to those gathered around the innkeeper, they ventured to question him again.

"Is this sorcerer . . . in the country?" asked one of them, in a trembling voice.

"You have all seen," replied Landriot, "that gentleman with the hooked nose, with the terrible air, who arrived yesterday at M. de Colignac's."

"Yes," said one voice, "the same who stared at me in a way that made me uncomfortable when he passed my door."

"Well," said the landlord, "that was he! . . . that was the sorcerer."

"But," replied one man, with grey hair, "if I am not mistaken, that gentleman is a native of these parts. Is not his name Cyrano de Bergerac?"

"Bergerac or not, man or devil," continued Master Landriot, "it is a fact nevertheless that he is sold to the devil and that he wrote books in Paris against our holy religion. That is why he is being followed, that he may be burned alive, like the damned one he is."

"Did you not notice," interpolated the . . . , "that it thundered yesterday when he sorcerer reached the square. Still the sky was cloudless. That is not natural."

"He was about to cast our lots," said another.

"Ha!" said Master Landriot, "that might be; those folks have only to look at you for all sorts of misfortune to happen to you; in a word, they can affect a whole herd with the rot, and they can, if it be their pleasure, make the wine turn in the casks."

"I hope he will be arrested?"

"This very day. The officer went in search of the

bailiff, on purpose. Before this evening, if God wills, he will be locked in the prison at Toulouse, and we will go to see him burned."

"Yes," ventured a timid one, "but who will arrest him?"

"All of us, if it be necessary. No one will hesitate to deliver the country from that plague, I hope."

"Landriot is right," cried the assembly. "We will all go. You will go with us, sacristan, and you will take a vessel of holy water."

The sacristan, a little, old man with a pale, fat face, who had listened to the conversation with an anxious air, made a gesture of terror when thus addressed.

"Yes," said the landlord; "Guilemin will go."

"Undoubtedly," stammered the sacristan, "undoubtedly, the holy water . . . but you will have forks, will you not?"

"Our forks and our knives, bloodthirsty man!" exclaimed Landriot, brandishing his cutlass. "Let us but wait until the officer returns."

Whilst this was going on at the inn, a result foreseen by Rinaldo, who had not confided in M. Landriot unintentionally, the false officer reached the bailiff's house.

At the visitor's first words, the man hastened to seat him in his own easy-chair, and insisted on standing before him, as a mark of humility and deference.

The bailiff was a corpulent man with a florid face: dull light blue eyes, veiled by long light lashes gave to his face an expression of indecision, detrimental to the authority of his acts. As for the rest, he was simple-minded, ignorant; loving ease above all else, he preferred to be guided in his steps and did not

often venture to take the initiative in an enterprise.

He exercised his office with an absurd solemnity and would gladly have put the good-will of a man whose dislike he feared, or from whom he hoped for favor, before the law. All connected with the law were to him objects of adoration; a sergeant seemed to him a superior being; he was in a state of ecstacy when, on his rare visits to Toulouse, he had the honor of meeting the lowest official, and the very name of the King drew from him protestations of respect and devotion which the most exaggerated hyperboles could imperfectly express.

Rinaldo saw very quickly with what sort of personage he had to deal, and with secret satisfaction he said to himself:

"The devil is on my side; I did not hope for such success."

When the supposed officer was seated and when he had exhausted all the words he could to enlist the bailiff of Colignac and to flatter him, the conversation commenced.

"Do you know what I think at this moment?" asked Rinaldo.

"My perspicacity does not go that far," modestly replied the bailiff; "be kind enough, sir, to tell me your thought."

"Well, sir, I just said to myself that you were born under a lucky star and that many people might envy you your position, now, if they knew the important service you are called upon to render to the King and to the law."

"To the King! To the law!" cried the bailiff,

whom those two magical words inspired with respectful emotion.

"To the King, to the law," repeated the stranger. "I have told you that I was an officer from the provostship of Paris, but I have not explained to you the reason of my trip to this province. It is on serious business, sir."

"Ah! ah! serious business!" repeated the man, opening his dull eyes. "What is it?"

"You may judge of the nature of the business I am charged to arrest a great culprit, sir, a man who has published infamous works in which the principles of our holy religion are trampled underfoot, works in which the author does not fear to confess his diabolical practices, and in which the impudence of the magician is mingled with the blasphemies of the heretic."

"Why, that man is a horrible criminal," cried the bailiff, clasping his hands.

"He deserves the stake, sir. Thanks to his hellish skill, he succeeded in escaping from Paris and of evading me for several days. I followed him, and now, I have him. By saying: I have him, I mean to say that I know where he has taken refuge and that he can no longer escape me."

"Can he be . . . in Colignac?" ventured the bailiff.

"You have guessed it. He has been here since yesterday."

"What!" cried the bailiff, deeming it proper to appear virtuously indignant, "such a culprit was within our walls, and I knew nothing of it! Ah! What will you think of my zeal, sir?"

"Rest assured, your zeal is not at fault. Nothing

at first sight distinguishes a culprit from an innocent man, and you might easily have passed by our man without his having appeared suspicious to you."

"It must be so."

"He whom I am looking for," continued Rinaldo, "is at present in the house of Count de Colignac."

That name caused the bailiff to make a slight grimace. He feared the Count greatly and did not care to interfere in his affairs, but his zeal should triumph over all personal consideration.

He ventured to object timidly :

"I would remind your Honor that Count de Colignac is a good Christian and a faithful servant of the King."

"What matters that? Do the wolves mind entering a sheep-fold? But I have not told you the name of my fugitive."

"No."

"It is Cyrano de Bergerac."

"Bergerac!" cried the bailiff. "Was it not he who published an abominable libel, a tissue of lies and infamy, against His Eminence Cardinal Mazarin?"

"It was. You see that he deserves no pity. You know the man now; I have nothing more to give you but some directions with regard to him."

"Directions?"

"Undoubtedly, since you will arrest him."

"I?" cried the bailiff, with agitation.

"Do you shrink from the task, from the duty? Ah, sir, if the King knew it!"

"The King! that is true! I will arrest him, sir, I will arrest him. But, what if he should resist?"

"The inhabitants of Colignac will help you if neces-

sary. Believe me, sir, that in entrusting this mission to you, I am only obeying a sentiment of deference for you. You are the first magistrate of this district, the representative of the royal law; it is but proper that I should yield to you the honor of a capture to accomplish which I have employed my entire skill. Was I not right in saying that you were born under a lucky star?"

"So much honor!" murmured the bailiff, in confusion. "Believe me, sir. . . . Will the King know that it is I who. . . ."

"Surely. Will I not have to make my report and relate all the facts faithfully?"

"The King will know it! This is one of the proudest days of my life!"

Rinaldo drew from his belt a parchment which he held before the bailiff's eyes and to which was appended a large seal bearing the arms of France.

The bailiff bowed respectfully.

"Here," said the officer, "is the grand provost's order which gives me full power in this affair; this power, I now delegate to you."

The bailiff was too deeply inspired with respect to venture to ask to examine Rinaldo's pretended order. He had seen the arms of France, that was sufficient for him; to require more would have seemed an enormity to him.

"Take a piece of parchment," continued the maker of dupes, "and write, according to the usual formula, the order for the arrest, wheresoever he may be, of M. Savinien de Cyrano, called de Bergerac, accused of heresy and of sorcery. I will sign when you have finished."



The bailiff seated himself at a table, and with a very unskilful hand began to write the order.

The man felt the perspiration trickling down his brow, so afraid was he that he would not properly draw up the form demanded of him. After having chewed the end of his pen many times, while he sought a rebellious word, he concluded his work indifferently.

Rinaldo took the document from the bailiff's hands, read it with well-simulated gravity and returned it to its author, having signed at the end the name of Claude Papelin, which he had assumed for the occasion.

"You are right here," concluded Rinaldo. "In an hour, you must repair to Colignac's castle to proceed with M. Cyrano's arrest."

"And then?"

"Then? . . . Have you a jail at Colignac?"

"Of course!"

"Well! you must put your man in it, and have him guarded closely until my return."

"Are you going away, sir?"

"I am going to Toulouse, where I have important business to attend to and from there I will bring back a squad of police to conduct your prisoner to Paris. Until then, you will answer to me for him with your head."

"I am ready to pay with my life my obedience to the orders of the King, sir. I am not very quick to form a resolution; but, when I have orders, you see, the devil could not make me turn back."

"That is well said, sir. Now, I will leave you in order not to delay you any longer in the execution of your mandate."

“And I will hasten to Landriot’s inn, where I shall surely find my clerk and several excellent people ready to second me.”

“If I am not mistaken, they are prepared for the event. Master Landriot seems to be a gossip, and as I told him a few words relative to the object of my journey, I fancy he did not keep them to himself very long.”

“The matter is sure. Ah! you are a remarkable man, sir. You do not neglect one detail.”

The two men left the house and turned in the direction of the tavern.

There, while the bailiff talked with the peasants assembled in the coffee-room, Rinaldo had his horse saddled, and set out, trusting to his delegate’s promise.

He had attained his object; he had succeeded in stopping Cyrano or at least in delaying him long enough so that the nobleman would not be able to thwart his plans and intervene at the moment when, in concert with Ben-Joël, he was making an extreme effort to gain possession of de Lembrat’s document.

Following the valet’s directions, Ben-Joël had been at Saint-Sernin for more than two days, and although he had not gained the curé’s confidence, matters were in good shape.

Rinaldo would arrive just in time to gather the fruit of his strategy.

Once the document taken, at whatsoever price it might be, Rinaldo cared little for Cyrano; he would return to Paris, give his master the treasure obtained with so much difficulty, and would get the rich reward promised him for his skilfulness.

The strange idea of Roland's valet, that idea he had just put in execution, was not as puerile as it appeared to be.

At that epoch the forms of the law were somewhat irregular; people were arrested for any reason whatsoever, and languished in prison without any one deciding to inquire into their fate, and into the real cause of their detention.

They had been imprisoned, that was sufficient for them to appear guilty.

The imputation of an imaginary crime was often sufficient to snatch an innocent man from liberty, and on that accusation alone their wrong was believed in. The suppositions amplified the fact, the inquiry rendered the details more obscure instead of elucidating them; the formidable machinery of the law had deadened in the accused all sense of resistance, and delivered him bowed, doubting himself, to his prejudiced judges. Often too, daring neither to condemn nor to absolve him, in the face of the obscurity of the facts, they simply forgot him in his jail.

Rinaldo knew all that very well, and he had shown the proof of his skill in deciding to set out, without awaiting the end of the adventure.

To remain, would have been to expose himself to a meeting, to explanations, to inquiries and very probably to a disgraceful defeat.

To put a weapon in the bailiff's hands, to urge him forward and to leave him to himself, after seeing him filled with the importance of his mission, was, on the contrary, the preparation of mysterious complications, in the midst of which the bailiff embarrassed, but inflexible nevertheless in his obedience, must necessarily

persist in the execution of an act, whose principle he was too respectful and too timid to dare to argue.

The crafty knave had given the bailiff only general information regarding the facts imputed to Cyrano. He had insisted on one point only: the importance of the arrest.

In the manner related, the magistrate was to proceed all alone and to become, unknown to him, the accomplice of Rinaldo's machinations and the unexpected auxiliary of Roland de Lembrat's enterprises.

XXVI.

SAVINIEN, Count de Colignac and Marquis de Cussan were still at the table, when the steward of the castle announced to his master that the bailiff wished to speak to him without delay.

"The bailiff!" exclaimed Colignac. "Ah! What can M. Cadignan want with us? Admit him, he can explain while drinking a glass of old Médoc with us."

The door of the dining-room opened, and M. Cadignan appeared, blinking his eyes and bowing low enough to break his back.

"Not so much form, my dear Cadignan," cried the Count; "we are in an excellent humor, and ceremony displeases us. Sit down, take a glass and tell us the reason for your visit."

As we have seen, Count de Colignac was a *bon vivant*, not at all proud and always ready to grasp an opportunity to refill his glass and to empty it to the health of somebody.

The bailiff sat down, assuming a modest air. He was, at the moment, greatly embarrassed by his size, and did not dare to raise his eyes to the three men.

The sight of Cyrano, in particular, had inspired him with a sort of terror, which he vainly tried to hide.

"Well!" said Savinien, taking pity on his confusion, "do you refuse, sir, to explain to us? To your health, bailiff, although your health, it seems to me, cannot

be much improved. You are, indeed, the most imposing magistrate of France and Navarre."

The poet held out his glass toward that of M. Cadignan. The latter dared not refused the honor paid him, but his hand trembled so, that he spilled on the cloth part of the wine poured out for him.

"Are you ill?" the Count inquired of him. "You seem quite upset. Drink, that will do you good."

Cadignan complied and thought he should strangle as he drank, for his throat was contracted by an unconquerable emotion.

However, he did not lose sight of the object of his visit.

"Count," said he, "I desire to speak with you in particular. Will you grant me that favor?"

"Gladly; but why not explain yourself before these two gentlemen. I have no secrets from them."

"There is no question here of *your* secrets, Count."

"That is different. Then follow me into the garden. It will be so much the better, for our meal is finished and the air will do us good."

The Count rose, and, preceding the bailiff, descended the three steps of the marble perron leading from the dining-room into a garden designed according to the pretentious taste of the epoch.

The two men walked several paces in silence. Bergerac and Marquis de Cassan followed at a respectful distance, making sport in low tones of the heavy step and the grotesque looks of the bailiff of Colignac.

M. Cadignan felt more ill at ease than ever, and could not find words with which to begin his exordium.

"Well, my dear friend," said Colignac to him, "speak now, we are alone."

Forced into his last intrenchment, the timid magistrate decided to do what he considered his duty, sparing the Count's feelings at the same time, for he did not wish to alienate his favor.

"Count," he commenced, in a conciliating air, "you know that there is not one of us in this town of Colignac, who is not your ally, your relative, your friend or your humble servant, and that, in consequence nothing can happen to you that will not touch us directly."

"*Peste*, that is a promising beginning. Continue, my dear, you interest me prodigiously."

"I say, then, Count," continued the bailiff, repeating himself a little in order to gain time and not to arrive at the fact too brusquely, "I say then no pleasure can come to you at which we would not rejoice, and no calamity in which we would not share. Now, we are informed from an excellent source, that you . . . that . . . that you . . ."

Cadignan stammered.

"Well, then," said the Count. ". . . That I . . ."

"That you have in your castle a heretic and a sorcerer."

Those words were spoken very hurriedly, in one breath, and upon their delivery the bailiff felt relieved of an enormous load.

The Count began to laugh.

"A sorcerer," said he. "Oh, gods! name him to me. I will put him in your grasp. But take care, calumny should be feared."

"How, Count, is there any place as good a judge of sorcerers as Paris? Well, I have received from that very Paris the order to arrest him whom you are sheltering."

"The devil!" cried the Count, looking at his companion, whom he was beginning to think mad, "the matter is serious, M. Cadignan."

"The King is interested in it, and I have here a warrant signed by one of the officers from the provostship of Paris."

Colignac was so surprised that he could not reply.

"You see, Count," continued the bailiff, feeling more at his ease on not encountering any resistance, "I know very well what will wound you in this. The magician is a person whom you like. But fear nothing; out of consideration for you, things will go on quietly; you have only to deliver him up to me, and, for love of you, I promise on my honor to have him burned without a fuss."

"You are exceedingly kind," smiled the Count. "The sorcerer's name, if you please?"

The bailiff prudently lowered his voice.

"It is your guest," he whispered, "M. Savinien de Cyrano."

At those words, Colignac burst into such a roar of laughter, that he was obliged to plant his fists in his sides to moderate that hearty explosion.

M. Cadignan, disconcerted, looked at him with an offended air.

"Come here, Bergerac, come here!" cried the Count, half suffocated. "Ah! such things are bad for digestion."



"Sir, I cannot join in your gaiety," said the bailiff, trying to purse up his thick lips.

Savinien and the Marquis came up.

"Come, my dear boy," said Colignac to Cyrano, "listen to M. Cadignan: I am disabled. It seems that you are a heretic, a sorcerer, the devil in person, and he has come to arrest you."

"Bah!" said Cyrano; "they are fond of joking at Colignac!"

"I do not wish to argue with you, sir," said the bailiff, severely. "I am executing my orders, nothing more. In the King's name, I arrest you."

"All alone?" sneered Cyrano.

"I have the strength of the law on my side," said Cadignan, solemnly.

"And also," interpolated Cussan, "a band of peasants ready to help you. I have just espied the rabble gathered in the courtyard of the castle."

"Now, that is *too* much!" exclaimed Colignac. "M. Cadignan, I will have you and your men sent home with switches, if you do not leave as quickly as possible. Arrest Savinien! The thing goes beyond all bounds."

Cyrano reflected.

"After all," said he, turning to the bailiff, "it is possible that your mission was to arrest me. Show me your order."

"It might be," he added, aside, "that there is some strategy of de Lembrat's beneath this, and that that old madman of a Jean de Lamothe has lent himself to this manoeuvre, planned probably to bar my way."

The bailiff unfolded his parchment and held it before Cyrano's eyes.

"Bah!" cried the latter. "What is that? An order signed by an officer! Since when has an officer had the right to order an arrest?"

"Since that right was delegated to him by the provost, sir," replied Cadignan.

"Where is this officer? Why is he not here?"

"That is our business, and not yours. Come, follow me without resistance. I will respect the honor done you by M. de Colignac in receiving you into his house."

"Bailiff," said Cyrano, seizing the man's arm and fixing his sparkling eyes upon him, "know, that at this moment, neither God nor the devil would be capable of arresting me."

"You see, M. de Colignac," cried poor Cadignan, in despair, "he blasphemes!"

"And," resumed Cyrano, "depend upon it that if you or your men attempt to place your finger on the skirt of my cloak, I will slash you in such a manner that your flesh will hang in slices around your neck. That being said, I am your servant, M. Cadignan."

"But, . . ." ventured the magistrate.

"*Sangué!* Sir," cried the Count, "must you be horsewhipped to make you go? No, you are not worth the trouble. Simply go to bed, keep your feet warm, and when your brain has become clear, you must return to ask my pardon for your absurd insult."

"I will go, Count, but I do not renounce my rights. I wished to avoid a scandal. If you do not, very well. As long as M. Cyrano is with you, I shall respect your house; when he leaves it. . . ."

"I shall leave it this evening, M. Cadignan," interrupted Cyrano. "You are now posted, I hope. You

can put your army on foot and prepare your honorable ribs."

Cadignan made a gesture of fury, planted his hat on his head and left the castle with lengthy strides.

"That excellent man is beside himself!" said Bergerac, calmly, watching him disappear.

"Do not let us jest too much," said Colignac.

"Cadignan is as stupid as an owl and as stubborn as a mule. He will not easily give up his idea, and he will play you some trick. If you will take my advice, you will stay here another day. In that time, I will throw some light on matters."

"You are jesting! I should be at Saint-Sernin, and make yourself easy, your Cadignan will not prevent me from reaching there."

"What does that order mean, forsooth? What sort of madness has brought this persecution upon you?"

"You know it well. I wrote my *Voyage à la Lune*, and the fools saw in it all sorts of attacks against religion and all sorts of practices, born of my fancy, which make me a first cousin to the devil. Do they not call me Captain Satan? Enemies,—and I have them,—have no doubt thought it well to add this trouble to a great deal more they have made me. But, bah! I scoff at their inventions. With a sword and a horse, I feel myself strong enough to overturn or to clear all obstacles. That is why, my dear friend, I shall set out at the close of day."

"We will accompany you."

"I will not permit it."

"What if some misfortune occurs to you!"

"Ah! What do you think will happen to me?"

Worthy Cadignan trembled with fear when only look-

ing at me. Would he dare to venture to face me on the high-road, even were he to be supported by all the inhabitants of Colignac?"

"You are probably right. His enterprise having miscarried, the bailiff will no doubt ask assistance of the Marshal at Toulouse. While he is losing his time there, you will be far on your way. You will be wise to leave this evening by the park and to take the road without going through the city streets."

"My faith, no!" said Cyrano, always disposed to take the most rash course. "That would make them think I was afraid, and you know very well that such is not the case."

XXVII.

ON rejoining his auxiliaries, that is to say Master Landriot and his friends, the bailiff's face wore a discomforted expression, as he related to them in a few words his ill-success.

All returned to the inn, where a council was held as to the best decision to be made.

"I am afraid of vexing the Count," said Cadignan. "Therefore it will be necessary to operate quietly and unknown to M. de Colignac as much as possible. We might assemble on the road to Cussan, at some little distance from the town, and seize the sorcerer when he appears."

"I will take my holy-water sprinkler along in order to exorcise him," said the sacristan.

"That can do no harm," agreed Cadignan.

"And I my arquebuse," added Landriot.

"That is right. Do you others have good sticks, lances, knives and some strong cord to bind the prisoner with. Gavisac, Pierre Corne and Lesenyer will watch near the castle, and when the magician leaves they must hasten to warn us, at the turning of the Gilded Cross (*Croix-Dorée*).

"Agreed, sir," said the three men designated.

"There! Now, we will separate, to meet again in one hour at the Gilded Cross. I shall go to see that the jail is in condition to receive the prisoner, and to have two new bolts put on the door."

It was five o'clock when Cyrano left the castle.

The Count and the Marquis accompanied him to the square of the town, when, at his request, they took leave of him, after assuring themselves that no alarming demonstration was being made on the main street, whose entire length they could see.

Savinien, with head erect and inhaling the fresh air, slowly walked down the street. His eagle-like nose and his terrible eyes alarmed all the gossips of the town, who had been informed by their husbands of the adventure in preparation, and who were stationed at their doors in order to see the sorcerer pass.

He smiled with an air truly Satanic, as if he were making sport of the good people's alarm.

No one dared to utter a word along the road.

He quickened his horse's pace in order to make up the time lost with those bravadoes.

Meanwhile, at the Gilded Cross, Cadignan, with about twenty peasants, was patiently awaiting his man.

Master Landriot acted as lieutenant to the corpulent bailiff, assisted besides by his clerk, ready for action, and flanked by the sacristan, who was armed with a gigantic holy-water sprinkler in a brass vessel filled with holy water.

The peasants had pikes, forks and old guns. The arsenal of spiritual and temporal weapons was complete.

Landriot, like a skilful tactician, had, besides, stretched a rope across the road.

That rope, tightly fastened to two saddles of oak, about a foot below the ground, mingled in color with the dust on the road and could not fail in its effect, in case Cyrano, escaping the first attack, might attempt to run away.

Pierre Corne,—one of the three spies taken by Cadignan from the main body of the band,—soon came running, breathless, to the crossroad of the Gilded Cross.

“He is there!” said he, “he is there!”

All hastened to take up arms. The turning in the road still prevented them from seeing the traveler, but they could distinctly hear his horse’s hoofs.

Cadignan was overcome by an instant of weakness. But the remembrance of the officer’s words, the prospect of the service he was called upon to render to society, to religion, and still more, probably, the security his escort guaranteed him, soon dissipated that feeling.

At the very moment when Savinien, thinking himself freed from the bailiff’s annoying and ridiculous claims, reaching the turning of the Gilded Cross, he found himself face to face with the magistrate.

His horse, frightened by the noise made by the weapons, stopped short, and Cyrano saw at once that, while ten peasants supported the bailiff, the rest of the band had turned a grove of oaks, in order to gather *en masse* behind him and to cut off all retreat to Colignac.

“Ha! what! Bailiff, is this serious?” cried the nobleman, not deigning to draw his sword in order to make a passage for himself.

“I arrest you, in the King’s name,” said the bailiff, raising his voice to hide his secret terror.

Then, to his men, he said:

“Take the prisoner!”

“You were told, Master Cadignan, to go to bed,” sneered Cyrano; “allow me to give you occasion.”

At the same time, he struck the unlucky magistrate's fat face two or three blows with his riding whip, spurred his horse, made an opening in the throng rushing to meet him and flew at a gallop along the road to Cussan.

At the end of twenty paces, the poor horse came to the rope stretched across the road, and horse and horseman fell in the dust together.

As he fell, Cyrano uttered a terrible oath, which was answered by a cry of triumph from Cadignan's band, and the nobleman, in an instant was surrounded, fallen upon by the numbers and finally disarmed and securely bound.

He did not even have the satisfaction of defending himself, one leg having been imprisoned under the horse's side, at the time of the accident.

He was lifted from the ground, having been bound from his shoulders to his feet by a strong rope, and he received a shower of water on his face.

It was the sacristan's holy-water sprinkler beginning its work.

"*Satanus Diabolus*," said the servant of the church, mutilating his Latin, "I conjure thee by the great living God!"

"Knaves! Pedants! Stinking beasts!" cried Cyrano. "it will cost you dear for having thus annoyed a man of my stamp. I will. . . ."

"*Satanus Diabolus*," interrupted Landriot's harsh voice, taking up the sacristan's lame exorcism, "I conjure thee in the name of God and of St. John to leave us alone; for if thou stirrest foot or hand, I will disembowel thee."

And he brandished his cutlass with a fierce air!



During the discussion between Cyrano and his vanquishers, the clerk examined the former's luggage, contained in a small portmanteau fastened behind the horse's saddle.

He found there a volume of Natural Philosophy by Descartes, and, on seeing the circles by which the philosopher, in that work, has distinguished the movement of each planet, he exclaimed with a conviction that would have made Bergerac laugh, had he not been in such a pitiful plight.

"See here, sir, these are the magic figures by means of which the sorcerer produces his enchantments."

Master Cadignan, who was bathing his cheeks with the holy water in order to soothe the smarting pain caused by the blows received on such a glorious occasion, took the book, looked at the astronomical shapes with the air of a connoisseur and shook his head, saying:

"This is an overwhelming discovery for the accused. I will inform the officer of this. Now, my brave fellows, take the prisoner on your shoulders and carry him to the jail at Colignac."

The triumphal cortège began to move.

Cyrano did not utter a word of complaint, he seemed resigned; indeed he was already dreaming of a means of escaping from that dilemma, a result he would not have attained had he indulged in imprecations against his guards.

The nobleman's horse had been left to himself on the road.

The clerk, a man of order, took him by his bridle and gently led him to the town, where he put him in

Master Cadignan's stable, just as the doors of the jail closed upon Cyrano.

That jail had for its guardian a shoemaker of the name of Cabirol, and as he was seldom given prisoners to guard, Cabirol devoted almost all his time to the exercise of a trade in which he flattered himself that he was a master.

A workman of his calling also served him as assistant jailer, on the rare occasions when an inhabitant of Colignac was expiating some misdeed behind the bars.

Cabirol's wife and daughter completed the quartette of free occupants of the jail, a sort of vault above which was a large room, which served at once as parlor and shop, and one floor divided into three small chambers.

There were in that cellar but four cells, without light and air.

It was into the smallest of these that Cyrano was cast.

"Pizoche," cried the jailer to his servant, when Cyrano had been placed, still bound, on the cold parlor-floor, "light the lantern and precede me. We must take this ring-leader of wizards to the madman's cell."

Pizoche obeyed, and Cabirol, taking his calm and silent prisoner on his shoulders, carried him away to his cell.

There he flung him upon some straw for the most part rotten, and knowing that he could not attempt to escape, he began to take off his bonds, having sent Pizoche away.

Cyrano, once free, could see, by the light of the lantern, the repulsive aspect of the cell he was sen-

tenced to live in, and which Cabirol significantly called the madman's cell.

"My good fellow," he then said to the jailer, "if you are giving me this stone vestment for a coat, it is too large, but if it is for a tomb, it is too small."

"Very well," said Cabirol, morosely, "you will get used to it."

And he continued his inspection of all the corners of the cellar, but that examination might have been dispensed with, for it was of hard stone, without a sign of a window, and offered no other exit than the door which was securely locked.

During that careful as well as useless scrutiny, Savinien, familiar with the customs of the men in prisons, discreetly slipped into his hose all the money he had on him.

It was well for him that he did so.

Cabirol approached him, and began to search him unceremoniously.

"What are you doing?" Cyrano asked, affecting a tone of anger.

"I have a right to," replied Cabirol. "Moreover, I suppose I am doing you no wrong."

"On the contrary, you are laboring at this moment for my good," said Cyrano, smiling at his joke. "You see, my friend! If, as they say, I trade with Satan, I must put the proceeds in my purse."

"Oh, *vertubleu!*" then cried the jailer, vexed at not finding a penny, "I knew that he was a sorcerer. He is as beggarly as his patron Beelzebub."

He took up his bunch of keys to reopen the door of the cell and to go to relate his ill-luck to his wife.

Savinien profited by the movement when Cabirol

had his back turned, to quickly extract three pistoles from their hiding-place :

“Jailer,” said he, “I wish to show you that I am a good devil. There is a pistole; I beg of you to have me some supper sent hither; I have eaten nothing since noon.”

Cabirol stared in amazement.

“A pistole?” cried he. “Where did you get it?”

“There is another to repay you for the trouble you are about to take.”

“Oh! oh!” smiled the jailer, suddenly relenting, “what did they say to me? God forgive me, you are an honest gentleman!”

He extended his hand for the money, adding :

“I will do as you ask.”

“Do still more,”—and a third pistole glistened between Cyrano’s fingers,—“send your assistant to me to keep me company, for I do not like solitude.”

Cabirol’s hand was again outstretched.

“They were surely mistaken in putting you here,” he murmured, in a softer voice. “So generous, so peaceable a man, capable of. . . . No, I cannot believe it. Keep up courage, sir, I will take it upon myself to prove you as pure as snow in less than three days.”

These protestations did not keep Cabirol from bolting the door on going out.

“I know the fellow’s weakness,” then said Cyrano to himself; “if the servant is what I think him, the rats scampering about here will not have me for a companion long.”

XXVIII.

SAVINIEN spent a very unpleasant hour in his cell. He was commencing to grow impatient and to doubt his lucky star, when the jingling of keys and the pushing of the bolts on the door, aroused him from his reflections.

The light of a lamp entered the cell, and Pizoche appeared, carrying a steaming pot, which he set down quite near Cyrano.

"Well and good!" said he, "my money has not been stolen."

"Ah, ah!" replied Pizoche, whose naïve and weak face wore a broad smile, "you are right not to grieve; here is a cabbage soup which if it were . . . Well, it is some of our mistress' own soup; and, my faith, not one drop of grease has been taken off it."

Speaking thus, he dipped the ladle and also the tips of his fingers into the mixture, as if to invite Cyrano to imitate him.

The nobleman was hungry.

He bravely took his share of the coarse food, seized the wooden spoon given him by Pizoche, and blowing his portion to cool it, in his turn buried it in the savory soup.

"*Morquienne!*" exclaimed the servant, "you are a good fellow. They say that you have enemies! they are traitors! Ah! could they but come hither to see! Be sharp, be sharp! Sir sorcerer! he who dances keeps on moving!"

Cyrano laughed at that *adieu*; and began to rival in ardor Pizoche, who put spoonful after spoonful into his immense mouth.

When the pot was empty, the two companions could talk.

Pizoche had unceremoniously unhooked his vest in order to be more comfortable.

Savinien then noticed a scapulary which the man wore under his garment.

That discovery suggested to him an idea which he did not fail to put into execution.

"You are poor, my friend, are you not?" he asked of Pizoche, "and you do not earn much in this jail?"

"Alas," replied the clownish fellow, "if you were a wizard, you could not have hit the mark better."

"Well, then," continued Cyrano, "take this pistole."

Pizoche held out his hand, but it trembled so that he could scarcely close it when Cyrano had placed in it the pistole he had offered him.

That unsteadiness surprised him somewhat.

"What ails you, my boy?" he asked.

"Sir, it is joy," replied the poor devil. "I have never had so much money of my own."

"That being the case, I can make you very happy!"

"How?"

"If you are the man who would like to be concerned in the fulfilment of a vow I have made, twenty pistoles shall be yours."

"Almighty Father in heaven, twenty pistoles? Could I hold so many?"

"You will see, if you consent."

"Speak, that I may see."

Cyrano assumed a mysterious air.

"You must know, my friend," said he, "that not a quarter of an hour ago, a moment before your arrival, my angel appeared to me and promised to show me the justice of my cause, provided that I would go to-morrow to say mass at Notre-Dame de Cussan, at the high altar. I tried to excuse myself on the plea that I was in prison; but the angel replied that a man would come, sent by the jailer, to keep me company, and that I would only have to bid him conduct me to the church. I fancy, my friend, that you are that man."

"One cannot tell," said Pizoche.

"Listen: the angel told me that the man would then conduct me back to prison and that he must obey me under penalty of dying within the year."

"It was not I, I am very sure," replied the peasant, who seemed to receive Cyrano's insinuations with indifference.

"I do not know if it is you or some one else; but I know that if he should doubt my word, I have but to tell him that he is a member of the scapulary, and I say it to you. Reply."

"Ah! then you have double sight! I am, indeed, a member of the scapulary. It is strange you should have guessed that."

"Can you deny my power, now?"

"No. I will, my good sir, do as the angel has commanded me."

Cyrano heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"But," continued Pizoche, "it must be at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, because Master Cabirol will be in town at that time, attending the marriage

of his daughter to the hangman's son. Just listen, the hangman has a name, as well as a flesh-worm. They say that the groom will receive as a wedding-gift from his father, enough money for a King's ransom."

Savinien cut short that chatter and said to his dupe: "You must not fail to bring me one of your coats to wear that I may not be recognized and which I will return to you on coming back to prison."

"I will give you my camlet coat."

"Then, to-morrow morning you must go to Castle de Colignac to see if the Comt knows of my imprisonment."

"I will go for that too."

"Now, adieu," concluded Cyrano, dismissing his auxiliary, whose simplicity lent itself so readily to the execution of his plans; "I shall try to sleep a little."

Indeed, he did lie down upon the straw flung in one corner of the cell, and tried to rest.

On the following day, Pizoche arrived before the appointed hour. Under his arm he carried the garments which Cyrano hastily exchanged for his.

"Do you assure me," asked Pizoche, when the preparations were completed, "that we will return here after mass?"

"Since I am in your charge, why should I not return, I should like to know?"

"Well, you know, a sorcerer like you, who receives visits from the good Lord's angels, must be very subtle. None the less, let us go out into the air, for it is almost nine o'clock."

"Ah! my friend, I ask nothing better; precede me and take care that we are not discovered."



"There is no danger; just push your hat over your nose, which, with all due respect to you, is a very noticeable mark."

Cyrano did not exactly like allusions to the formidable size of his nose.

But under the circumstances, he was indulgent to Pizoche and contented himself with replying gently:

"Your advice is very wise, my friend; but you have forgotten to tell me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Have you done the errand at Château de Colignac which I entrusted to you?"

"Yes! but I found nobody at home, that is, the Count left to-day at dawn, with the Marquis de Cussan, to hunt on his estate, Fezac, about twenty leagues from here."

"The devil!" cried Cyrano. "Well! . . . Let us start."

"You are a brave man," said Pizoche, before leaving, "but I must warn you. I will take you to Notre-Dame de Cussan; but first I must tell you that if you should try to escape on the way, this little 'barker' will bite your legs."

And Pizoche drew from his breeches a long revolver, which he showed to Cyrano.

"Good," said the poet, "you are a prudent youth, but your 'barker' will die before I give him occasion to bite."

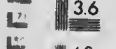
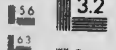
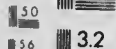
Talking thus, the prisoner and his cerberus had climbed the cellar-steps and reached the parlor of the jail.

Fresh, sweet air came from without, expanding Cyrano's lungs.



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“Ah!” he cried, “liberty is nice! Without further delay, my boy, I will pay you what is due you.”

And opening his hand generously, he offered Pizoche, blinking them enticingly, the twenty promised pistoles, which he had had in readiness in advance. It seemed to Pizoche as if he saw twenty suns pouring their warm rays upon him, he was ashamed to accept so much money.

Mistaking for mistrust what was only hesitation, Cyrano said to him:

“Take them. They are gold and full weight, I swear to you.”

“Ah! sir, I do not doubt that.”

“Take them, then. Of what are you thinking?”

“I was thinking that Macé’s house is for sale, together with the closes and vineyards. I can buy it for two hundred *livres* (pounds); it will take eight days to close the bargain, and I would ask you, my dear sir, if you please, until Macé can put your pistoles in his chest, not to let them become oak-leaves, as does sorcerers’ money always.”

“Indeed,” said Savinien, laughing at the naïve selfishness, “I promise you.”

They left the prison immediately. Pizoche passed his companion through a gate leading into the fields and made him go about a hundred paces through a cornfield.

Then he took a path meeting the main road diagonally, within gunshot of the last houses in Colignac.

“High mass is at ten o’clock,” he then said to Cyrano. “Let us walk quickly, if we wish to get there in time for the beginning.”

Cyrano did not need to have the advice repeated.

Thinking of his poor horse which would have been so useful to him, and which at that time was obliged to eat out of M. Cadignan's rack, he hastened along the road at such a pace that his companion soon had difficulty in keeping up with him.

The church-bell of Cussan was ringing the last summons to mass when the two travelers reached the village.

Almost all the inhabitants were in the fields, for it was a week-day, and the curé of Notre-Dame was saying his mass in the presence of a small assemblage. Pizoche, following Cyrano closely, entered the church and kneeled in the last row of worshippers with him, just as the priest ascended the altar.

Worthy Pizoche was beginning to feel reassured as to the results of the escapade. His prisoner's docility gave him more and more confidence in his promise, and he flattered himself that he would be able to take him to the jail at Colignac without any trouble, confessing with admiration that he had never heard speak of a sorerer of such excellent parts.

Meanwhile the service went on. When it came to the offering, all those present rose to kneel, in turn, before the altar and kiss the gilded patin according to custom, having dropped a modest contribution into the pewter plate held out to them by the clerk.

Savinien slipped a silver piece into Pizoche's hand. "Give that to the singing-boy for me," said he; "I will give a pistole myself."

"Surely," murmured Pizoche, "you are a good Christian."

His turn had come to rise. He left his place, inviting Savinien by a gesture to accompany him, and, when he heard the prisoner's footsteps behind him, he

advanced with a feeling of great security toward the altar, and fell upon his knees on the marble floor, repeating a short prayer.

The pewter-plate was passed in front of him; he placed the silver piece upon it, then kissing the patin devoutly, he rose to give place to Cyrano.

But the latter seemed in no haste.

Pizoche turned, cast one sweeping glance around the tiny church and utter a prolonged "ah!" which greatly scandalized those assembled.

Cyrano had disappeared.

He had taken advantage of the moment when Pizoche ascended the three steps of the choir, and became utterly absorbed in the fulfilment of his religious vows; he paused a moment, stole slowly along the screen which separated the officiating priest from the worshippers, then cleared the nave in three bounds and finally wandered into the fields.

He was already outside of the village, when Pizoche discovered his disappearance and rushed in pursuit of him, striking his forehead with his fist in a desperate manner.

Cyrano knew the country as well as, if not better, than the credulous servant.

Therefore he had no trouble in baffling him in his search. After beating through forests and moors two hours, Pizoche, with bowed head, set out on the road to Colignac, racking his brains for an explanation of the sorcerer's flight, but, on the whole, consoled for his mischance by the possession of the pistoles which he held tightly in his hand, fearing lest he might lose them, and which did not seem disposed to change into oak-leaves.

XXIX.

THE distance from Cussan to Toulouse was so short that the fugitive could have made it in the two hours. A favorable circumstance helped him to clear it in one-third of the time.

As he hastened across fields to avoid Pizoche's eye, he saw on a heath a horse which had been put out to graze without suspicion of a thief or of a person like Cyrano then desirous of putting four or five good leagues between his collar and the bailiff's grasp.

The poet made straight for the horse, bestrode him unceremoniously, although he had neither bridle nor saddle, and, seizing his mane, set out at a gallop on the road to Toulouse, where he arrived toward noon.

At the gates of the city, he alighted and striking the horse's crupper with his hand, the beast by instinct started off in the direction of Cussan, while his rider modestly entered the suburbs of the city, intending to take the post-stage there for Saint-Sernin.

Cyrano was very poorly dressed.

The coat and trousers loaned him by Pizoche, were, indeed, miserable rags in which the holes could be counted by hundreds, or rather, could no longer be counted, and the ends of which were ravelled into fringes.

However, the poet, quite inexperienced in point of poverty, had arranged those tatters so fantastically, that with his stately air and his gait in utter contrast

to his attire, he looked less like a beggar than a disguised adventurer.

People were beginning to look at him in an embarrassing fashion, for, notwithstanding those rags, the sign of a beggar, he was walking briskly, with bowed head, and without extending his hand for alms from the passers-by.

He was not long in seeing that it would be better to enter into the spirit of his rôle, and overcoming his shame on seeing several stare at him, he went forward and in a piteous tone solicited alms, not without laughing in his sleeve at the originality of his situation.

Walking along thus, he reached the place du Capitole, and at the corner of that square ran into a man issuing from a house.

The man having been rudely pushed, uttered an oath and a threat.

"Have pity on a poor soldier," groaned Cyrano, "and if you are a good Christian. . . ."

An angry exclamation on the part of the man whom he had addressed prevented him from completing his sentence.

He raised his eyes and recognized Cabirol, the warden of the jail at Colignac, who had gone to Toulouse that very morning, as we know.

The two men stared at each other in consternation.

"Ah! wretch!" cried the jailer, finally, "I am lost!"

Savinien took an extreme measure.

"Lend a hand! sirs," he cried to the people who were commencing to gather around, "lend a hand to the law. This man has stolen Count de Colignac's



diamonds; I have been looking for him for three days."

Scarcely had he uttered those words, than the throng rushed upon the poor jailer, whom Cyrano had boldly seized by the collar and held tightly so that he could not reply.

"Pillage! Pillage!" cried Cyrano's aids; "let us take the thief to the provost."

Ten hands snatched Cabirol from Savinien's grasp. The jailer struggled and fell upon the ground, dragging after him a number of porters and footmen hanging to his clothes, like dogs to the sides of a stag.

For a moment there was an indescribable commotion. Cyrano profited by the brawl to fly, crying: "Do not let him escape; I am going for the officers."

And he passed through a narrow street which led to a quarter in which he hoped to find shelter, to change his costume and to obtain a post-chaise.

Meanwhile, about a dozen constables from the provostship hastened to the place du Capitole at the sound of the battle valiantly sustained by Cabirol, fell upon the populace, dispersed them and faced the jailer of Colignac at once recognized by the men of the law.

When he could breathe, Cabirol explained matters and related his adventure at length.

The people, as variable as the wind, wished to expend the rest of their irritation on Cyrano; they joined the constables in order to give him chase and to again put him behind the bars.

In less than a half-hour the entire town knew that a very dangerous man, a sorcerer of the worst kind, a thrice demanded heretic, had escaped from the jail at

Colignac, and was being pursued through the streets of Toulouse.

The good citizens came forth from their houses and mingled with the common people and the soldiers to witness, and, if necessary, to lend a hand in the capture of the great criminal.

So that Cyrano, who thought himself almost in safety, having reached rue de la Triperie, lost in the midst of a labyrinth of narrow and winding woods, suddenly heard a loud noise and was disagreeably surprised on seeing a number of constables led by Cahrol in person, rush into the other end of that street.

The fugitive turned back as quickly as his legs would carry him.

But he had been seen.

The constables and the jailer followed him. They ran well, but Cyrano had wings.

He succeeded in putting between them and him the length of four or five lanes and stopped, quite out of breath, in a cross-way.

It was evident that he must find some expedient without delay, or succumb.

Thanks be to God, he had an inventive mind. He besmeared his face, rubbed dust in his hair, divested himself of his doublet, tucked up his breeches, and flung his hat into a cellar air-hole.

That done, in the twinkling of an eye so to speak, he spread his handkerchief on the pavement, and having put four pebbles at the corners, as did leprous beggars, he laid down next it, with his stomach on the ground, and began to mean piteously.

Scared had he taken that posture than he heard the cries of the populace furious in his pursuit.

A moment later, the crowd rushed like a whirlwind into the lane.

On seeing the tall, lean form stretched on the ground, on hearing the lamentable moans of the false leper, the good Toulousians redoubled their speed and passed, holding their noses, but not without flinging several coins into the poor man's handkerchief.

Cyrano breathed only when the sound of his persecutors' steps died away in the distance.

Then, he gathered up the money lying on his handkerchief, philosophically slipped it into his pocket as the legitimate price of his cleverness, and took refuge in an alley in order to resume his clothes.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, hearing nothing more, he resolved to venture out.

But, as he left his place of refuge, a second band, not noisy like the first, but silent and creeping stealthily like cats, appeared unexpectedly before him.

Had Cyrano chosen that moment to cast himself into his enemies' hands, he could certainly not have appeared more opportunely.

A formidable hoot saluted his appearance, and the constables as well as the citizens feared they had not enough arms to stop him.

They fell upon him, and seizing him, some by his hair, some by his legs, some by his clothes, they dragged him to the side of the prison.

Several hands, thinking more of his money than of his person, searched him thoroughly and took from him the rest of his pistoles.

"Well," thought Cyrano, still struggling, "I think I shall certainly have a great deal of trouble to reach Saint-Sernin. Ah! my poor Ludovic!"

"Sirs," said he, finally, to the constables, "I put myself in your charge. See that this rabble spares me its rudeness; you will answer for me."

"March," said a soldier; "we will conduct you to the town."

A loud noise coming from the upper end of the town was heard at the moment when Cyrano, escorted by his guards, reappeared on the place du Capitole.

Almost immediately a man ran up, and, addressing the soldiers, said:

"Hold on to your man; the provost's constables are coming down, claiming that it is their sole privilege to lay hands on the prisoner."

"Good!" said Cyrano, "they are now about to dispute the honor of having taken me."

"You belong to us," said a soldier to him. "And beware of falling into the clutches of the provost's people, for you would be sentenced in twenty-four hours, and the King himself could not save you."

Notwithstanding those words indicating an intention of resistance, the city constables did not hold out long in the presence of the provost's men, who arrived on the square in good order.

The head of the band cried:

"With us!"

And, suddenly, the city constables and those from the provostship closed in a tumultuous *milice*.

Such conflicts often occurred between the two bodies, which represented two different and rival jurisdictions, that of the King and that of the municipality.

The people championed the cause of the city con-

stables. They were repulsed with a vigor which aroused Cyrano's admiration.

"*Peste*," said he, "these are men who fight bravely. If they overwhelm their fellow citizens thus, what would they do with me?"

The crowd was beginning to disperse.

Profiting by the confusion, the object of the flight, our friend Cyrano allowed himself to be dragged along by the stream of people, in which he was so well hidden that he again believed himself out of peril.

Meanwhile, the provost's constables continued their attacks on the people and the soldiers of the city demanding with an energy more and more menacing the prisoner stolen from them.

Cyrano kept on running.

A stout man, who was fleeing also, suddenly cried, turning to the people around him:

"Shelter! shelter! Come, my friends, it will be difficult for those rascally constables to turn us out of here."

And uttering those words, he ran toward a large dark door, and knocked loudly on the panel with his fist, crying:

"Corporation! Corporation! Shelter for the people of Toulouse!"

The door opened. The entire band which Cyrano had deemed it wise to join, rushed inside.

There the good citizens' gaiety began to return.

On the contrary, Cyrano's uneasiness increased.

Finally, but too late perhaps, he recognized the place into which he had stupidly entered.

The refuge sought by the citizens and several con-

stables, was the town prison, whose jailer, devoted to the corporation, had hastened to open the doors to the Toulonsians, in order to screen them from the attacks of the King's officers.

Among the fugitives, there were, as we have said, several constables.

One of them, having regained his composure and feeling assured that there was no longer any risk, put on a brave front.

"Comrades," said he, "we will defend ourselves here; let us take possession of the doors, and woe to him who shall attempt to break them open."

A triumphant cry greeted that proposition, and the recent fugitives rushed with an heroic air after the spirited constable.

Cyrano, alone, remained seated on a stone bench which was fortunately near him.

The poor man was about exhausted, and his energy could no longer sustain him. Bruised, bleeding, cut by the mob's rough attacks, dispirited at finding himself so far from his object, he was on the point of swooning.

"Ah! friend," cried the constable, who had proposed the defence of the place, "are you afraid, will you not go with us?"

Mechanically Cyrano raised his head and made a sign in the negative.

At the sight of that pale face, of the hair matted on the temples, of that large nose, the constable recognized the captive whose presence he had not remarked sooner owing to the swiftness of his course and his anxiety for his own safety.

"Ah! the devil!" he exclaimed, "it is our man,

comrades, it is our man! Surely, he has a good nose for he took himself to prison, and the provost's men will not get him."

Then, forgetting his plan for defence, he rushed toward Cyrano, crying:

"I take you, prisoner, in the name of the King!"

"Take me, my friend," said Cyrano, docilely, whom so many events, accomplished in one forenoon, had utterly stunned.

Those words having been spoken, the poet, at all the fibres of his being unbend; having no longer to employ strategy, nor strength, he gave way beneath the blow—and the valiant among valiants swooned like a woman, in the arms of the constable who had just arrested him.

## XXX.

WHEN Ben-Joël, traveling under the name of Castellan and bearer of Bergerac's letter, arrived at the village of Saint-Sernin and knocked at the door of the vicarage, the curé had finished his evening meal and was preparing to retire.

The Bohemian, preceded by Jeanne, the house-keeper, entered the dining-room, hat in hand, and with an honest and prudent air, gave Jacques the envelope containing Cyrano's missive.

The curé opened it and looked through the letter rapidly.

But, instead of expressing his feelings aloud and of extending a joyous welcome to the messenger, as Ben-Joël had expected, Jacques fixed his keen eyes upon him and examined him with a sort of mistrust.

He had not forgotten Savinien's instructions. Cyrano had warned him so emphatically against all surprises with regard to the valuable trust, he had recommended so much precaution, that the good curé did not dare, even in the face of almost irrefutable proofs, to follow the inclination of his heart and to offer his hand to the stranger who had brought him news from his foster-brother.

Instinctively, moreover, Longuépée felt a wall of ice between him and that man.

It was not thus that he had pictured Sulpice, the little frivolous clerk, who was nevertheless so full of devotion, of whom Cyrano had spoken to him so many times.



The traveler's sunburned face, his dark eyes, his smile, the falseness of which he scarcely succeeded in disguising, all accorded ill with the image Longuépée had cherished in his mind.

"The child has grown older; perhaps he has suffered: he has become a man since Savinien spoke to me of him," finally thought the curé; "I was wrong not to receive him more kindly."

And anxious to make amends for his mistake, Jacques extended his hand to the newcomer, and, resuming his kindly look, said:

"My dear M. Castillan, pardon me for not having received you at first with all the warmth you merit; but Cyrano has probably told you that in this matter mistrust must be our first rule of conduct. But I did not know you, and . . ."

"And," interrupted Ben-Joël, impudently, seizing upon the foreknown objection, "you thought for an instant that I could not be I."

"Precisely."

"Fortunately," continued the bandit, with admirable *sang-froid*, "fortunately my journey was accomplished without any obstacles. No one suspected that I was carrying a valuable message, and those who wished to injure my master had not keen enough scent to track me."

"I know you to be a man of experience, my dear Castillan," said the curé, who was becoming more familiar every minute. "But, pardon me, I forgot to offer you some supper. You must be hungry, I fancy. Sit down there; although my fare is simple when I expect no guest, Jeanne will do all she can to provide you with the best she can prepare."

"I am not difficult to please, sir. Moreover, you know that our time is limited, and, while eating, I must ask you to be kind enough to enlighten me with regard to your plans!"

"My plans! You know what Bergerac has written me."

"Undoubtedly. He wishes you to join him at Colignac, with me, to deliver over to him the document he confided to you to guard. I would simply like to know if you are ready to accompany me to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow," cried the curé, "you cannot think that. Can I leave my parishioners thus? Besides," he continued, having run through the letter again, while Ben-Joël set to work on the supper, promptly served by Jeanne, "according to Cyrano, he should have left Paris four days after you. It is useless for us to reach Colignac before him; it will do if we arrive there at the same time he does, that will give us a two days' respite, during which you can rest."

That arrangement pleased the Bohemian little.

He feared he might be stopped at any moment in the execution of his projects; he was in haste to complete them.

However, he could not help replying:

"As you like, sir; I am subject entirely to your orders."

While speaking thus, Ben-Joël, we can guess, hoped for an opportunity of finding a means of cutting short his stay, by gaining possession, by strategy or by force, of Count de Lembrat's document, whose real importance he took good care not to reveal to his host.

At the very time when the curé and the traveler

were chatting in a friendly manner of the affairs of the morrow, the true Castilian arrived in his turn at Saint-Sernin.

Before continuing, we must explain in what manner he reached there, and for that we must trace back the course of events.

No incident worth the trouble of being noted signalized Castilian's journey to Fontaines, where he arrived as ashamed of himself, as furious at his defeat, as eager in his pursuit of Ben-Joël as he had been at the very first.

There a surprise awaited him.

When, at dusk, he entered the only street of the village of Fontaines, a form came from out the shadow of a wall and approached him.

The secretary saw that personage to be a young peasant, whose long hair, surmounted by a hat full of holes, fell upon a smock-frock of brown linen.

"Ha! child, what do you want?" he asked, as the boy seized his horse's bridle.

"To conduct you to the inn, sir," said the peasant, "if you wish it."

The sound of his guide's voice made Castilian start involuntarily.

He seemed to recognize that voice, although it was strangely disguised.

"You are very kind," he replied. "Conduct me then, since you are here."

The boy walked before the horseman and stopped, after having gone a short distance, at the door of a stable.

"Jean," he then called, "bring a lantern and take this gentleman's horse."

When the groom, thus summoned, arrived, Castillan took the lantern in order to turn its light upon his guide's face.

But the boy had disappeared.

"I am mad," thought Castillan.

Then he asked the groom :

"Can I get supper here?"

"Your supper is ready, sir," replied the man.

"My supper . . . is . . . ready!" repeated the clerk, in astonishment.

"Surely! since they have been expecting you since this morning."

"The devil!" thought Castillan, "the matter is becoming more complicated. Bah! we will see! I have nothing more to lose now."

Instinctively he passed through a small door through which a ray of light shone into the stable.

"It is there," said Jean, who followed him, pointing out to him a room opening on the one he had just entered.

"Thank you," said Castillan, who had made up his mind to be surprised at nothing.

He pushed open the door which separated him from the room in which his meal was so opportunely served.

A table was set in that room.

At the table stood the little peasant whose voice had so abruptly awakened Castillan's memories.

Scarcely had he looked at him than a vivid flush dyed his cheeks.

He felt angry.

"Marotte! ah! thrice wicked woman!" he cried, rushing toward the gypsy, whom he had at one recognized beneath her disguise.

Marotte remained motionless, awaiting the effects of that first explosion.

She was very pale, and her eyes were downcast before Castillan's angry ones.

The secretary sought the hilt of his sword, then suddenly changing his mind, he seized the dancer's arm, and shook her roughly :

"Where is my letter? Wretch, where is it?" he cried.

"Have you not betrayed me villainously enough, is it but to laugh at me that you have brought me here?"

Marotte looked fixedly at the clerk, and in a voice, trembling with emotion, said :

"M. Castillan, you can kill me, you have the right to do so. I committed a cowardly act, what would you have? We were never taught to distinguish good from evil. My repentance has come too late to save you, but soon enough for me to be useful to you and to help you to regain your rights. Do you want me for your aid? Accept, I pledge you my word you will not regret it."

Castillan looked at the strange girl mistrustfully.

"Hum!" said he, "those are fine words."

"You do not believe them," said Marotte. "You are mistaken."

And resuming the playful tone natural to her, she added :

"My brave cavalier, one word will remove your scruples. I do not know what they want of you, Ben-Joël is far away, and, had I willed it so, you would never have met me again. So give me your hand and let us sup. I will then tell you what I can do for you."

A charming glance accompanied those words.

But Castillan no longer thought of love. He was in haste to reach Saint-Sernin and to take his revenge for his misadventure.

"You are a sorceress, I believe," he ventured, a smile playing about his lips; "you arrange things in your fashion, and one has only to say yes. But, remember, this time I shall not allow myself to be put to sleep by your diabolical airs."

Then Sulpice took the hand which Marotte extended to him and pressed it gently.

Peace was made, with due circumspection, at least.

Toward the middle of the frugal meal, Castillan, who had not ceased thinking of the strangeness of his adventure, suddenly asked Marotte:

"How does it happen that your plans with regard to me have changed thus? We parted, you know how, and here I find you ready to play the rôle of a good fairy."

"Do I know?" smiled Marotte. "Can one explain those things to oneself? The first time I saw you, you were, my faith, very indifferent to me; then I consented to deceive you; then again, I reflected, I thought of you, of your loyal sincerity, of your words, of your glances; finally, I found that I had changed; there was within me something that was no longer I. I did not recognize the Marotte of formerly. I longed to see you again, to serve you, to make you forget what I had been, by showing you what I could be. You see all that cannot be reasoned out. It matters little, provided that it is so. We two, I swear to you, will play master Ben-Joël a trick. Take me for your dog, for your slave. I have courage and skill; I wish to go to Saint-Sernin with you."

That womanish eloquence, increased by the charm of the girl's glance, by the sweetness of her voice, moved Master Castillan strangely.

"There is good in you," he confessed, "although the affair at Romorantin seems very difficult for me to forget! But you may go with me; two heads are better than one in difficult cases, and I believe you capable of giving Satan himself trouble."

Thus it was that Marotte, in the guise of a young peasant boy, resumed her seat near Castillan on the horse, which had borne her from Orléans to Romorantin, and thus the couple arrived at Saint-Sernin a few hours after Ben-Joël.

"Now, the question is," said Castillan to his ally, when they were in the heart of the village, "the question is to find the parsonage, the curé and the scoundrel who stole from me my letter and my name."

"Common-sense must tell you that the parsonage must be next the church, and we are now quite near the belfry. Moreover, I am familiar with Saint-Sernin; let me guide you."

"You are familiar with everything!"

"Not exactly; but I am familiar with Saint-Sernin, that is all that is necessary."

"Come along!"

"You are hasty. Do you intend to enter the curé's house thus?"

"Certainly!"

"What imprudence! You would have to stand a comparison. Ben-Joël would protest against you, and the curé probably would put you out of the door, for Ben-Joël has the advantage of having come before you."

"What is to be done?"

"Do not show yourself, and, before attacking the enemy, watch his manœuvres."

"Watch," grumbled Sulpice; "it is all very well to talk. But how can we watch? This square is as dark as a kiln."

"That lighted window down yonder, at the end of the square?"

"Well, that window?"

"Is in the vicarage. Your man is there, M. Castillan."

"That may be."

"You must know what he is 'oing there."

"You see, you are veering round to my plan. We must enter the curé's house."

"No! But, come."

The horse was tied to a tree on a patch of grass as thick as velvet, which offered him a litter and provender for the night, and the two allies turned their steps toward the corner of the square where was the lighted vicarage window, which was not more than eight feet from the ground.

"Brace yourself against the wall," whispered Marotte, "and lend me your back, if you please."

Castillan put his two hands on the wall and docilely offered his back to the girl.

In two bounds, the dancer was perched on the clerk's shoulders.

"Can you see?" murmured the latter.

"Yes," replied Marotte; "they are there."

Thus did the dancer watch Ben-Joël's and Longuépée's first interview.

She could not hear the words spoken by the curé and his guest; but by their attitudes, by their



gestures, by the expression of their faces, she could tell that the most perfect harmony reigned between them, and that the Bohemian had been accepted as Cyrano's real messenger.

She had then been right in advising Castillan to be prudent.

A conflict between Ben-Joël and the clerk might indeed destroy all the curé's confidence and determine him to expel the two competitors.

It was necessary to proceed with a certain amount of discretion; Castillan realized that at once, when Marotte, having come down from her post of observation, told him of the scene she had just witnessed.

"Now," said she, "the thing to do is to arrange a secret interview with the curé for to-morrow morning. That seems difficult to me, for in a village no one can remain unknown for an hour."

Castillan made no reply. But a plan was being formed in his mind.

"Listen," said he at length. "I know you well enough not to doubt you any longer, and I can plainly see that you are ready to serve me blindly; as for you, I do not believe that you think me altogether a fool, although at Romorantin . . . But, let us omit that reminiscence. You are forgiven. Well, my dear, I am about to ask a great favor of you."

"What is it?"

"I will take care of Ben-Joël and the curé. Before to-morrow dawns, I shall have found the expedient we are looking for. But as unforeseen difficulties may arise, as, in fact, the matter may take an embarrassing turn, the wisest thing to do will be to summon my master to my aid."

"Your master?"

"M. Cyrano de Bergerac. He will be able to disentangle the knot of this intrigue, if I am not sufficiently skilful to do so myself."

"From all you have told me, M. de Cyrano must be in Paris."

"Your memory is at fault. According to my calculations, my master must be very near Colignac, if he is not there by this time."

"And you wish?"

"I wish you to leave for Colignac, after dawn, and to bring back my brave patron to me."

"Will he have confidence in me?"

"A note, which I will give you, will remove all his doubts. Can you ride?"

"Like an Amazon."

"Good. You may take my horse, which I do not need here. I will undertake to assure the situation by your return. But tell M. de Bergerac to come without delay, and relate to him all that has occurred."

"Even that which concerns me?"

"Even that. He has a kind heart; he will be pleased with you for your frankness."

"Is he gallant, M. Castellan?"

"Such questions are prohibited, Mademoiselle Marotte," said the clerk.

"You are not jealous, I hope?"

"Hm! those women! In short, at present there is no question either of love, or of jealousy. We have other cares."

"I will set out, then, my lord and master," said Marotte, with remarkable submission.

"You will leave at daybreak."

"Why? Do you think I fear screech-owls? We must save time, and the three hours of night still left to us will give me a start of several leagues. Write your note."

"I cannot see at all here."

"Wait."

Marotte drew from her pocket a tiny dark lantern, furnished with a steel for striking a light, and procured for Castillan sufficient light to write several lines on a page torn from his tablets.

"You are surely a valuable woman," said he to the *danseuse*, as he wrote, "and it was very fortunate that I met you again."

"A truce to compliments, and adieu."

Castillan planted two kisses on Marotte's dusky cheeks, and the dancer, whose male attire left her limbs free, leaped into the saddle with the agility of a professional equerry.

"You did not boast," remarked the clerk. "You are a veritable Amazon."

At the same time he untied the horse and gave the reins to Marotte.

"Be prudent," she murmured, with a wave of farewell.

"Be prompt," replied the clerk.

The horse, to whom the girl gave the spurs, set off, as swift as the wind.

When Castillan could no longer hear the sound of his hoofs on the dusty road, he stretched himself at the base of the tree and watched until day began to break, not wishing to lose sight of the curé's house, for he was anxious to be sure of Ben-Joël's presence at the vicarage.

## XXXI.

THE sun had not yet appeared on the horizon, when, through the morning mist, Castillan saw a man hurrying toward the little church of Saint-Sernin.

That man was the sacristan.

He was about to open the doors of the sanctuary and to get everything ready for the daily service, for, during the week, it was Jacques Longuépée's practice to celebrate mass at a very early hour.

"I am fortunate," thought Castillan. "There is a very natural means of having a discreet interview with the curé. I will confess to him, and, if I am not mistaken, my confession will interest him more than if I had confessed a half-dozen mortal sins."

The inhabitants had not yet left their houses. Castillan could enter the church without being seen. It was still so dark within the chapel, that had it not been for the light coming from the vestry, the clerk would have difficulty in getting about.

He kneeled at the choir-screen, and when the sacristan came to place the vases and the missals on the altar, Castillan emerged so unexpectedly from out the shadow, that the poor man uttered a cry of terror.

"Do not be afraid," said Castillan to him in a low voice. "Do not be afraid, my friend. I am a poor traveler, and desire that after mass, your worthy pastor receive me at the stool of penitence."

How could one fear a man who put forth such a plea?

The sacristan, quickly reassured, pointed out a very dark corner to the stranger, saying:

"The confessional is there, my dear sir. In a little while, M. Jacques will join you. To-day is not the day for high mass."

"Thank you, my friend, pray for me."

As he uttered those words, Castellan sought the sacristan's hand into which he slipped a piece of silver.

"For the poor," he added, turning toward the confessional, where he settled himself, apparently buried deep in religious meditation.

The sound of footsteps and the murmur of voices soon informed him that the curé had arrived.

Jacques, indeed, had begun mass.

He had left Ben-Joel at the vicarage, still sound asleep; but his confidence, great as it was in the messenger, had not prevented him from carefully locking the door of his room, in which for two years he had kept Cyrano's mysterious document.

When, mass concluded, Jacques returned to the vestry, his assistant said to him:

"Some one is awaiting you at the confessional, sir."

"Ah!" cried Jacques, "one of my parishioners must have committed some great fault, that he takes such an early hour to come to accuse himself."

"The man waiting there is a stranger, sir."

"I will go to him. But who can the penitent be? No one came to Saint-Sernin last night, excepting Sulpice Castellan, my dear Savinien's secretary."

"I do not know. The man who asked for you did not let me see his face, and his voice is not familiar to me."

"Very well. Give me my surplice. This good Christian must not be kept waiting."

And the corpulent curé, whose footsteps resounded on the marble floor, seated himself in his confessional, having first cast a hasty glance at him who was awaiting him.

While waiting for the grating which separated him from his judge, to open, Castillan heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"At last!" said he, almost aloud.

"What did you say, my son?" inquired the curé, surprised at the exclamation. "Commence, if you please, the prayers of penitence."

"Father, excuse me; the confession what I have to make to you is not of a purely religious character. It concerns worldly interests, and, if I have taken the liberty of calling you hither, it was because it was important that no one should suspect the real subject of our conversation."

Longuépée, more and more perplexed by that preamble, deeming it proper to present an objection and, laying aside the paternal form of address used by the confessor, replied:

"Sir, it would have been easy for you to have spoken to me at home without fearing any indiscretion."

"It was just to your house that I did not wish to go, without having told you my little story. Therefore, let us remain where we are."

"Very well, sir. I am listening."

"The first of my confessions will consist in telling you my name. And that name, sir, will not be the least of your surprises. It is Sulpice Castillan."

The curé started.

"You will say to me, father," continued the clerk, not allowing Jacques time for astonishment, "that you have already one Sulpice Castillan at you vicarage. Which is the real one? He or I? It is to permit you to solve that delicate question that I am here, and if you will kindly listen to me, I will not be long in removing the doubt into which I have just plunged you."

Then Castillan related the adventures of which he had been the hero since his departure from Paris, without omitting the episode with Marotte.

"Sir," said Longuépée, having listened attentively to the confession, "it may be that all this is perfectly true; however, I can decide nothing in the absence of a material proof."

"My God, sir, I am not unaware of the difficulty of my position, and I willingly consent not to be taken for myself yet, since my usurper has been skilful enough to win your confidence. Permit me only to ask one favor of you."

"What is it?"

"According to my master's orders, you are to meet him at Colignac."

"Indeed!"

"Well, give up that project; await M. de Bergerac at your house."

"What are you proposing to me?"

"I propose to you a very prudent thing. Who knows if, when you are on the way with the man whom you persist in considering the real Castillan, he will not profit by your isolation to assassinate you and to gain possession of the document of which you have the care."

"That is going quite far in your suppositions. I am not a child, and I know how to defend myself, my friend."

"Undoubtedly; but remember that this Bohemian has accomplices, and that, being strong against him, you would be powerless against a band of rascals. In short, sir," continued Castellan, peremptorily, "you must remain, for the reason that I have sent word to my master to hasten to Saint-Sernin."

"You have done that?"

"This very morning, and through the medium of that very Marotte, who was the prime cause of my misadventure."

"Ah! sir, if you speak the truth, you have placed in very unsafe hands the welfare of the situation."

"Do not fear; I will answer for her now. Another word, sir. Have you a little confidence in me?"

"Your tone of sincerity touches me," replied Longuépée. "However, I have already told you, I have not yet sufficient reason to look upon my guest as an impostor."

"Very well. You may expect a revelation; it will not be long in coming. I suppose it is agreed that what I have just told you will remain a secret between us two?"

"Did you not tell me it was a confession?"

"Truly; I am satisfied. There remains for me to make one last suggestion."

"Make it."

"I would beg of you to tell your guest, on your return home, that you no longer think of setting out, having heard the news of the early arrival of your friend, Cyrano. You will see the effect of those



words. Indeed, I would ask you to be very careful, for it is probable that Ben-Joël may take into his head to wrest from you, by strategy or by force, the document entrusted to you."

"I will do as you desire. The whole adventure troubles me, and I feel that the slightest of my acts should be attended by prudence."

"That is well said, sir. If you happen to have an old sword in the parsonage, keep it within reach; if, which is still better, you possess a couple of pistols, put in them two good leaden bullets and a reasonable amount of powder. It may all be useful to you at any moment. Now that you have been duly forewarned, I will leave to you together with my master the responsibility of the issue."

Sulpice rose to retire.

At the same time Jacques left the confessional, and, seizing his interlocutor's arm, he led Castellan into the light, and looked keenly at him:

"You have the appearance of an honest man, my friend," said he. "Will you pledge me your word that Cyrano has been warned of what is going on?"

"On my honor, I swear to you that my messenger set out before daybreak," replied Castellan.

"Good! what shall you do now?"

"Wait."

"Have you engaged a lodging at some inn?"

"No! I do not desire to be seen; I shall find some post of observation in the vicinity of the vicarage."

"You would soon be discovered. Listen, I do not wish to neglect anything that might be useful in the present case, and there is much good in what you have

told me. So, steal behind the vicarage, push open a little gate which opens into the fields; you will find yourself in front of a stable belonging to me. In the stable is a ladder which leads up to a small loft: take refuge there; I will bring you food myself and will keep you informed as to what is going on. Do you agree to that?"

"I do; I believe that we understand each other. Will you tell Ben-Joël what I advised you to?"

"I promise you to do so."

"Ah! thank you, sir; let us go now; I fear nothing more."

"Let me go out first; but be at your post in less than two minutes."

Castillan obeyed the curé's instructions to the letter. He awaited a favorable moment in order to cross the small square without being seen, and found the hiding-place of which Longuépée had spoken to him without difficulty.

He had been there barely five minutes, when the curé appeared, carrying some bread, some wine and some other food.

"My man is still asleep," said Jacques; "I took advantage of that to bring you some breakfast, sir."

What shall I call you?"

"Zounds! call me Castillan, since that is my name."

"But the other?"

"The other? Call him 'knave.' He deserves nothing better."

"Let us keep from rash judgment," murmured Jacques. "Very soon, I shall be better enlightened."

And leaving his penitent to eat the breakfast he had brought him, Jacques went from the stable to the

vicarage which was reached through a tiny courtyard peopled with chickens and ducks.

Ben-Joël had risen and was awaiting the curé in the dining-room.

"Did you sleep well?" asked the priest, kindly.

"Very well. I thought it necessary to prepare for the fatigue and the lack of sleep attendant on our approaching journey."

The curé replied good-naturedly, watching the stranger's face carefully as he spoke:

"You did right, my dear Castillan; you can rest to-morrow and the following days, if you like, for we will not go to Colignac."

"We will not go to Colignac!" exclaimed Ben-Joël. "And why not, sir?"

"Because my friend Cyrano sent me word this morning that he might reach Saint-Sernin at any minute."

A ghastly pallor overspread Ben-Joël's face, and his voice seemed to die away in his throat.

The curé, who was looking at him, saw his transient annoyance. But the Bohemian, feeling the priest's sharp eyes upon him, quickly controlled himself, and, smiling, with the most natural manner in the world, he made answer:

"My faith, sir, I could not have had any news to surprise me more agreeably on rising! my master is coming! Well! Truly, I am delighted, for it is a proof that he is better. You know that I left him quite ill in Paris."

"I know that," said the curé, surprised at the turn affairs had taken, and, at the same time, greatly perplexed with regard to the suspicions suggested to him

by the real Castillan;—"I know that, and I can see by your delight that you are deeply attached to your master."

"I love him like a father!" exclaimed Ben-Joël, trying to squeeze a tear of emotion out of the corner of his eye.

The curé outstretched his hand, saying to himself: "Which of these men is deceiving me?"

"To-night, my good man," thought Ben-Joël, "I shall be on the way to Paris, and I shall have the de Lembrat document. Then let Captain Satan come, I will laugh him to scorn."

Thus the day ended.

Jacques, faithful to his promise, went to give an account to Castillan of the impression produced on Ben-Joël by the announcement of Savimien's arrival.

"That man is very shrewd," said Sulpice; "he replied naturally; I almost expected it. In his position one has to anticipate everything. Wait until night, sir, wait until night."

Ben-Joël, it will be easily seen, had, after the first threat of Bergerac's arrival, concocted a plan for the night that was to come.

He did not leave the vicarage all day, and posted himself carefully as to the interior of the house.

On entering the curé's room, in which Longuépée had spent part of the afternoon, Ben-Joël's lynx-like eyes were at once attracted by the oaken cupboard in the wall at the head of the bed.

"It is there!" said the Bohemian, instinctively to himself.

From that moment, his plans were made. They were simply to take advantage of the curé's short ab-

sence to pick the lock of the cupboard, or, if that opportunity should not present itself, to enter the room during the night, to stab Jacques and to gain possession of the valuable papers.

Ben-Joël was not the man to draw back. His plan conceived, he thought of nothing else but of carrying it out under the best conditions possible.

At supper, the curé, who had also thought over the events of the day and who had, like Ben-Joël, made out his little programme, said to his guest carelessly :

"Friend Castillan, if you will permit, we will not stay up very late to-night. It is necessary for me to be at the church after daybreak ; but that, I hope, will not prevent you from sleeping."

"Very well, sir," smiled the adventurer. "If you wish to retire, do not mind your humble servant at all."

"Ah! I am not in such great haste that I cannot offer you, before retiring, a glass of our Saint-Sernin brandy. It is not as good as the Cognac, but you know the proverb: 'For want of thrushes. . . .'"

"One catches blackbirds," completed Ben-Joël, gaily.

Having drunk to his guest's health, the curé retired, leaving him to his servant's care.

When he deemed the priest sound asleep, the Bohemian took a candle and in his turn sought his room.

On passing the curé's apartment, he noticed that the key was no longer in the door.

Cautiously, he pressed his finger on the latch, raised it and tried to push the panel.

The door resisted.

It was bolted on the inside.

"The devil!" said the bandit, "Master Jacques is

prudent. I did not anticipate this. Bah! I will wait until to-morrow. Bergerac cannot have made such speed that he could gain four days on us."

And he stole along the corridor, making no more noise than a shadow.

Instead, however, of going to sleep immediately, he flung himself dressed on his bed, lying in wait and ready to seize a favorable opportunity.

Howsoever great was his desire to succeed, the solitary watch was to fatally overcome our strategic bandit.

Toward midnight, his eyes closed in spite of himself, his head fell upon his pillow, and he was sound asleep.

The clock of Saint-Sernin was striking three when Ben-Joël awoke.

He rubbed his eyes, muttering an oath.

"Imbecile!" said he, "I have been asleep. Perhaps there is no longer time."

The window admitted into the room the first glimmer of dawn. Ben-Joël rose and looked out at the church.

It was still closed, and no one was to be seen on the square. Shortly afterward, a sound was heard in the direction of the curé's chamber.

The bandit drew a deep breath.

The sound, at first indistinct, became more distinct, and Ben-Joël soon heard the street-door open and shut.

He again ran to the window, just in time to see the curé cross the square and enter a lane to the left of the church, which he took, no doubt, in order to enter his vestry by the private way.

Zilla's brother did not lose any time in wondering. He felt that he must act without delay.

Consequently, he armed himself with a short iron crowbar and some pick-locks, took between his teeth his open knife and walked toward Jacques' room.

The door was still locked.

To force a lock, however, was but child's play to Ben-Joël.

He operated so well, that the door opened as if, to obtain that effect, the Bohemian had had only to utter a magical word, or as if he were the owner of one of those "hands of glory," before which, according to certain wonderful stories, gratings and the stoutest bolts yield.

Once within the room, the bandit rummaged hurriedly, as if to quiet his conscience, in all the drawers and looked on all the pieces of furniture; then he turned to the oaken cupboard, where was, he thought, the treasure so greatly desired by him.

Having rapidly surveyed the braces, he slipped his crowbar under one of the panels and leaned on the instrument with the whole weight of his body.

The oak cracked beneath that violent effort, but the iron-work resisted.

Ben-Joël, deeply engrossed in his enterprise, was about to recommence his efforts, when the curé's deep voice suddenly said behind him:

"Ha! M. Castellan, what are you doing there, if you please?"

The curé was standing in the centre of the room, erect, with folded arms.

Those bantering words caused the Bohemian to start, and he turned in order to face the danger.

Not being able to deny the obviousness of the fact, he flung away his crowbar, took his knife in his hand,

and, drawing himself up in front of the curé with a menacing air, he sneered :

“ You have said your mass, soon, sir ; it will be so much worse for you.”

“ Wretch ! ” thundered Jacques, “ are you not ashamed of the occupation you are pursuing ? ”

Ben-Joël rushed forward, his dagger upraised.

At the moment his arm was descending, the curé's hand seized it on the wing and held it in a grasp that almost crushed the bones.

“ Drop your weapon,” he said to him at the same time.

That advice was superfluous. The assassin's benumbed fingers had already relaxed and the knife they held had fallen on the floor.

Ben-Joël had no luck in his enterprises. He tried to speak, to humble himself, to save his skin, as he had not long since when he was so severely beaten by Cyrano on the road to Fougérolles ; the curé did not give him time.

“ If God had not forbidden us to shed blood,” said he, “ it would be well to rid the world of a creature like you. Thank Him for having let you fall in the hands of a Christian.”

Ben-Joël, in response, turned a sudden somersault to free himself.

“ Ah ! you take it thus, do you,” cried Jacques. “ You like neither advice, nor sermons. Well, my knave, take yourself off elsewhere. It is fortunate for you that Cyrano has not arrived.”

Speaking thus, the curé unceremoniously seized the Bohemian by his breeches and by the upper part of his doublet, then, lifting him off the floor he carried



him leisurely toward the window which he pushed open with his shoulder.

"Do not kill me, sir," whimpered Ben-Joël in affright, "do not kill me."

"Now, jump, nocturnal thief," replied the curé, holding the Bohemian out over the casement, suspended in space.

"Mercy!" cried Ben-Joël's suffocated voice.

"Jump," repeated the curé. "The window is seven feet from the ground. Are you afraid?"

Ben-Joël ventured to look and saw the ground quite near him.

"Let go of me, that I may jump," he murmured, humbly.

"You have decided; that is fortunate. Well, a safe journey, my knave; but do not try this again: another time you will not get off so easily."

Jacques' hands opened, and the Bohemian, who, danger having disappeared, had regained all his *sang-froid*, fell on the grass with the elasticity of a cat.

That done, he fled as fast as his legs would bear him, and not without fearing lest a bullet might hit him *en route*.

Having done as we have seen, the curé hastened to the loft, where Castillan already awake, was impatiently awaiting the news of the day.

On seeing Jacques open his arms to him, Sulpice guessed that something decisive had occurred.

"My brave boy," said the priest, kissing his cheeks, "you have saved my life."

"Ah! ah!" cried Castillan. "Our man. . . ."

"Our man!" interrupted the curé, "he is far away, if he is still running."

And, in a few words, Jacques repeated to the young man the scene just enacted.

"What!" exclaimed Sulpice, "have you allowed him to escape?"

"Undoubtedly. After being unmasked, he is no longer injurious."

"Undeceive yourself. However, what you do is well done; you cannot be blamed for your kindness of heart. M. de Cyrano's arrival will put an end to your anxiety and will restore your tranquillity."

"Amen!" replied the curé, with a smile. "Come and take possession of a lodging more worthy of you, my child, my true Castilian, this time."

The two new friends descended together, and Jeanne was surprised to see another personage sit down to the substantial breakfast she had carefully prepared for the guest of the preceding day, who had disappeared before she could learn the reason.

All this plunged the good woman into a reverie, from which the curé did not think it proper to arouse her on that day.

Cyrano's approaching arrival was the sole object of Jacques' thoughts.

He awaited his friend with childish joy, with ill-disguised impatience.

He was anxious to embrace him first, and then to return to him the valuable document, which, for two years, had caused him so much anxiety.

XXXII.

BEFORE seeing what happened to Ben-Joël, as well as to Cyrano, then in the grasp of the Toulousian law, we must return to Zilla's story.

She had just discovered Comte Roland's criminal designs, and had gone out alone in the middle of the night from the House of Cyclops, a prey to a feeling bordering on madness.

Where was she going? At first she did not know herself. Having run to the Pont-Neuf, which she crossed with a rapid step, the fresh night air somewhat abated the burning fever, that urged her on aimlessly through the city; she paused before the *châtedet* and began to think.

Gradually her thoughts assumed more tangible shape; she threw back her head resolutely and continued her walk with a deliberate step.

Zilla had now a purpose.

She walked up the right bank of the Seine, passed through the narrow lanes adjoining rue Saint-Paul, and knocked at the door of Hôtel de Lembrat.

The master of the house had returned an hour since; all were asleep within the mansion. Nevertheless, she raised the wrought iron knocker and let it fall upon the large door.

A noise was heard in the courtyard; footsteps approached, and a rough voice asked:

"Who knocks?"

"I wish to speak to M. de Lembrat," replied Zilla, impatiently.

"The Count is resting; this is not the time to see him."

"Open the door, I tell you; I have come on a very important errand."

"Go along, woman! And do not knock again, or I will have you arrested by the police. Did you ever see the like! Disturbing folks at this hour of the night!"

With those words the inflexible porter walked off, his heavy steps awaking the echoes.

The gypsy saw that another attempt would be useless. Besides, she thought she need fear nothing for Manuel during those few hours.

Resolved not to allow the Count a chance to escape her, she seated herself on the stone at the door of the hôtel, wrapped herself in her cape, and remained motionless in the darkness, murmuring:

"I will wait."

That night seemed as long as a year. The dampness of the dawn made Zilla shiver; but her head was burning, and that feverish ardor kept her from yielding to suffering and fatigue.

Day broke and found her wan, but with sparkling eyes: shivering, but erect and ready for the struggle.

A vague stir round about the mansion soon announced the reawakening of the city; several pedestrians were to be seen at the end of the street, and the woman heard a creaking sound that was made by the bolts of the grand entrance, which were slipped by the porter's hand; the two oaken doors opened, and Zilla could see into the court, where Count Roland's servants were already moving about.

As it was necessary to be prudent in such a situa-

tion, Zilla decided to leave her post, without losing sight of the door of the hôtel.

An inn was open a short distance away; she went into that place to warm herself for an instant, then she asked for water, with which she bathed her face, waned from her long vigil, rearranged her garments, and again proceeded toward the mansion.

The fierce porter, who a few hours before had used her so harshly had no doubt forgotten or taken for a nightmare the incident of the night, for he seemed neither surprised nor angry when Zilla presented herself before him.

It was not, moreover, the first time he had seen the young woman, and the lackeys had told him that the master of the house was not indifferent to her.

They did not know the nature of the relations established between the Count and the Bohemian, but those relations were certain; that sufficed to spare Zilla a disagreeable reception.

She addressed herself to a footman who came to meet her, gave her name and asked almost imperiously to speak to the Count.

"His lordship has not risen," objected the man.

"Announce me," insisted the visitor.

"Awaken him? Oh, no, I would not dare to. Wait, if you like."

"Very well."

And Zilla, at a sign from the lackey, accompanied him to the apartments, where she was seated in a spacious ante-chamber, and bidden to be patient.

Three mortal hours passed thus. Finally, the sound of a well-known voice reached Zilla's ears.

The Count was up and very angry, judging by the pitch of his voice.

Soon afterward Roland appeared. The young woman did not mistrust that she was the sole cause of the irritation still to be read in the Count's looks, the outburst of which had reached her.

She took a step toward him and without waiting for him to question her she said, in a brusque tone:

"I wish to speak to you."

"So early?" the Count attempted to smile.

"The hour does not signify. Dismiss your attendants."

"You speak quite regally, my dear. What is the matter?"

He dismissed the servants, who had followed her, and with an impatient air, he asked:

"I am in haste; what do you want?"

"I will tell you. You came to my lodgings yesterday, under a false pretext, and you took from me an object which I have come to demand back. Give it to me."

It was impossible to equivocate. Zilla's peremptory tone did not permit Roland to doubt it.

The Count feigned astonishment and replied:

"An object? That is very vague. I only brought a letter written to Manuel from your lodgings. Is it to that letter you are alluding?"

"You know it is not!"

"Then, I do not understand you."

"Let us go into your room, sir."

"For what?"

"To obtain there the vial of poison you stole from me yesterday!"

The Count started slightly, although he was prepared for such an attack.

That start did not escape Zilla.

"You see," she exclaimed, "you are not as ignorant as you say."

"I am astonished, that is all, and if I did not believe you mad or distraught by some inexplicable affection, I would receive your demands and your insults less tranquilly."

"Give me what I ask of you, my lord."

"You persist in that, do you? Ah, my child," smiled the Count, whose accent softened in proportion as the gypsy's voice became angry, "be kind enough to tell me for what I have need of poison? If I wanted it, besides, there is no lack of Lombard or Florentine druggists from whom I could buy it."

"That is possible, but having found within reach of your hand the weapon necessary to you, you took it; it was less compromising."

"Come, Zilla, what is exciting you? What do you thi . . .

"I ask that you wish to rid yourself of Manuel, and that you made use of me for that."

"I do think of Manuel! If I wished to rid myself of him, as you say, I would have a thousand means instead of one. The first and most simple would be to have him sentenced, and still I proposed to you to get him out of prison."

That was said very naturally with a certain good-nature which for an instant shook Zilla's convictions.

The Count remarked the effect produced by his last words, and a furtive smile played about his lips.

"Are you convinced?" he added, thinking to establish his triumph.

"I cannot allow myself to be convinced without proofs."

"What proofs do you require?"

"Help me to gain an entrance to the *châtelet*. I wish to speak to Manuel."

"That is impossible."

"In that case, give me back the letter I wrote to the prisoner yesterday, on your advice."

"Do you then refuse to save Manuel?"

"I will tell you. First, give me back my letter."

"I would like to," tranquilly replied the Count; "unfortunately, or rather . . . fortunately,—for I understand your interests better than you do—I have not it."

"Where is it?"

"Manuel must have it now—I had it sent to him."

"When?"

"This morning."

"That is false!" exclaimed Zilla. "I have spent the night at the door of your house, and no one left it."

The Count made a movement of anger, which he quickly suppressed. Care was requisite with regard to Zilla; one word from her lips might, if not ruin him, at least compromise him gravely.

"You are a woman," he added, "and I pardon your flat contradiction. You may believe, however, Zilla, that nothing is truer than what I tell you. The future will show you that you were wrong to suspect me. That said, my child, I must leave you. Duty calls me to the Louvre."



And, waving his hand to Zilla, he passed her by and disappeared, leaving her speechless in the middle of the room.

Almost immediately five or six servants reëntered the ante-chamber where the scene had taken place, and Zilla saw that she had no business there.

"That man is deceiving me," she thought, as she withdrew; "but my will shall triumph over him. Manuel shall be warned against his snares."

Zilla's thoughts did not deceive her. Roland still had the letter which he pretended to have sent to Manuel. He did not give it to the gypsy, although it was of no use to him, since he had in his possession the poison he had gone in search of at the House of Cyclops, assuredly because he wished to spare Zilla, and to play his rôle to the end.

The gypsy turned in the direction of the *châtelet*, with the intention of applying to M. Jean de Lamothe himself for permission to communicate with the prisoner.

An usher, not without some objection, showed her into the grand provost's presence.

The latter received her with a severe air. In his eyes, Zilla had been the accomplice of Manuel's supposed usurpation and only owed her liberty to the Count's benevolent intervention.

He had, it is true, looked upon Ben-Joël's and Zilla's confessions as sufficient reparation for the wrong committed; but that did not prevent him from cherishing in the depths of his heart an honest dislike of those culprits metamorphosed into denounciators and witnesses. Jean de Lamothe had been an all too ready dupe for Roland and his assistants, and it was

in entire good faith,—it is well to repeat that,—that he devoted his time and his intellect to the direction of Manuel's trial.

Zilla was not in the least embarrassed by the grand provost's reception, her love for Manuel being prepared for all sacrifices as well as for all humiliation.

She approached the immense table laden with bundles of papers and bags behind which Jean de Lamothé was enthroned, and, in a slow and composed voice, she asked:

“Do you know me, sir?”

“Undoubtedly. Have you come to inform me of some new fact?”

“No! I have come to ask a favor of you.”

“What is it?”

“Permission to see Manuel.”

“Aha!” cried the magistrate, “to see Manuel! You cannot think of that, my girl!”

“You have the power to grant me that favor.”

“Yes, but you have not the right to ask it.”

Zilla threw back her head.

“And why not?” she asked, with a sense of rebellion.

“You are very curious. Must I tell you that I am not sure of your return to a good life, and that I do not wish to furnish you with an opportunity to talk with Manuel?”

“What can I do that would be so terrible?”

“Do I know? Go, my girl, go and sin no more.”

“Sir, I implore you. Manuel's life perhaps depends upon it! Let me see him.”

“You are wasting your time.”

“Let me write to him at least.”

"Enough of this. I am busy. Your tears will not move me. When I have said no, it is no. You may be sure of that."

"If I were to tell you," cried Zilla, in her excitement, "if I were to tell you, sir provost, that you have been deceived, that . . ."

The provost rang a bell.

A bailiff appeared, M. Jean pointed to Zilla:

"If this woman comes here again," he said, "I forbid you to allow her to enter."

Having said those words, he rose, repeating the scene just enacted fifteen minutes before at Hôtel de Lembrat; he pushed open a door at the end of the room and disappeared.

Zilla uttered an exclamation of anger. She was about to confess all, and they would no longer believe her, they would not even listen to her.

The hope she had cherished on presenting herself at the house of the Count and at that of the provost vanished forever.

Ben-Joël's sister could rely only on her own strength.

At this moment she suffered a terrible hallucination.

She saw Manuel writhing on the floor of his cell. He had drunk the poison poured out by a hand hired by the Count, and he was dying, cursing Zilla.

"No, it shall not be," she cried, "I will not have it so; I will prevent it."

And, wondering what she should do to dispel the danger she felt to be near, she reached the foot of the grand provost's staircase, which she had ascended a few moments before almost certain of success.

She had only several steps to take to reach the door of the prison.

The constables of the provostship did not fail to greet her, as she passed, with many gallant remarks; but she cast upon them a glance at once so haughty and so sad, that not one ventured to address her again.

For an instant she paused thoughtfully before that inexorable door, which one word from M. Jean would have opened wide, and there a mad plan occurred to her.

"I will offer myself as a servant to the jailer!" she thought.

A bitter smile curled her lips. She saw the folly of that inspiration.

A better plan must be found. Then, although her heart was heavy, the gypsy drew up her supple form, feigned a gaiety she did not feel and, walking up to a group of idlers at some distance off, whose attention she had attracted quite a while before, she began to sing a merry *chanson*.

In a trice she was surrounded. The constables came one by one to join the curious; after them came two or three servants from the jail, toward whom Zilla's attention was more particularly directed. One of them was very young, and undoubtedly the trade he was plying was new to him, for he had a face as frank and bright as could possibly be imagined.

The heavy prison atmosphere had not yet clouded his brow, the sight of human suffering had not yet dulled the brightness of his eyes.

Insensibly, Zilla drew near him. A sort of intuition told her that she was about to find an excuse near that boy.

She ceased her song and took the hand of one of the constables, saying as she did so:

"Do you wish to know your future? I will read it in the lines of your hand."

The constable drew back his hand, somewhat frightened at the sudden proposition. A mocking sneer ran through the crowd.

"He is afraid!" said one voice.

Zilla did not insist. She looked inquiringly at those assembled, and ten hands were held out to her at once.

For some time she played the rôle of a fortune-teller, to which she had been accustomed from childhood, and as the young man whom she had singled out seemed to hesitate to ask her to cast his horoscope, she smiled at him, and beckoned him to approach.

He quickly obeyed that encouragement and offered his open hand to her. Zilla rested her finger on the line of life, and her fascinating eyes sought those of the youth.

"Happy boy," said she then, "he loves . . . and he is beloved."

That revelation, easy to make when he who consults the oracle is a handsome youth of barely twenty years, caused a deep flush to mount to the boy's brow.

"And, . . ." he murmured, "do you know . . . ?"

He did not finish his question. He feared he might say too much perhaps and wished to leave it to Zilla to relate herself all the secrets of his heart.

"Come," said the fortune-teller, "what I have to reveal to you, must be heard by you alone."

## XXXIII.

THE crowd made way for the gypsy. She did not relinquish the hand of the youth, whom she drew aside.

“What is your name?” she then inquired.

“Johann Müller,” he replied.

“Listen to me,” said Zilla; “you are young, you are in love, and I can see by your expression that you would easily sympathize with the misfortune of others.”

“Why do you say this to me?” murmured Johann, surprised at the tone in which those words were uttered.

“Because I have need of you, and because from the first moment I saw that you would not repulse my prayer.”

“To her who guessed so quickly that I loved, and who predicted my happiness, I can refuse nothing if what she asks is possible to me.”

“Thank you, child,” said Zilla.

And her hand pressed that of the young man more firmly, while her eyes, full of gratitude, were fixed upon his.

“You see that tomb,” she continued, pointing with a melancholy gesture to the high walls of the *châtelet*; “it confines the best part of my heart, for I also love, and he whom I love is perhaps about to die there.”

With her admirable feminine instinct, Zilla had divined that sentiment would have more effect on

Johann's honest and generous soul betrayed by his glance, than vulgar bribery.

She might have offered him gold; she preferred to cast herself on the youth's kindly instincts, to make him the confidant of her sorrow, to interest him in her hopes, and to cause to vibrate within him chords more delicate than those of personal interest.

He looked at her with surprise, but without being startled by that beginning, which, however, made him feel that Zilla was about to ask something compromising of him, or at least something dangerous to his peace.

The gypsy's face breathed of a hope so fervent, that he had not the courage to enforce silence upon her nor to abandon her.

"Of whom do you wish to speak?" he ventured to ask, having glanced furtively around him to assure himself that no one was within hearing.

"You have heard speak, no doubt, of a young man whom they accuse of having usurped the title and name of another?"

"Is not his name Mameel?" interrupted Johann.

"It is! Do you know him?"

"As well as one can know a prisoner, seen by the light of a lantern, in the shadowy darkness of a cell."

"Poor Manuel! He suffers a great deal, does he not?"

"If he suffers, he, at least, does not complain.

"But excuse me," added Johann, immediately, "it is time to enter the *châtelot* again, and if it is in this Manuel whom you are interested, I have told you all I know of him."

At the same time, he took from his pocket a small

piece of silver and tried to slip it into the gypsy's hand.

Zilla refused it gently.

"One moment," she said, "I have not told you all. And if you have nothing more to tell me, I have still one great favor to ask of you."

"I have told you that I shall be happy to oblige you. Speak quickly, for if the jailer should see me dallying thus with you, I should certainly be punished."

"No! God will protect you, for you are good. This Manuel, whom you know and whom I love, is threatened by a great danger, Johann. He has powerful enemies. Try to remember: has nothing strange happened with regard to him?"

"Since when?"

"Since he has been at the *châtelet*? Since this morning, especially."

"No, with the exception of the visits made him by M. Jean de Lamothe to examine him, and those of a gentleman who has obtained permission to speak with him, I have seen nothing worth noting."

"And . . . was that gentleman here last night?"

"No!"

Zilla breathed a sigh of relief.

"Wait," said Johann, reconsidering his last reply, "when I said that the provost and that gentleman alone had seen the prisoner, I made a mistake. . . ."

"What happened?" queried the fortune-teller, feverishly.

"A man was just at the *châtelet*, a valet, I think. . . ."

"What was that man's object?"



"He brought some provisions to the prisoner. . . ."

"Provisions!" cried Zilla, very pale.

"Yes. Some kind soul has been touched no doubt by Manuel's distress, and knowing that the prison diet is hard, wishes to mitigate its severity somewhat."

"Ah! all is lost!" exclaimed Zilla, wringing her hands in despair. "The time I spent at the grand provost's sufficed for the wretch to accomplish his aim."

Johann did not understand her sudden grief. He tried vainly to calm Zilla. She did not hear him. The terrible vision she had had an hour before, again appeared to her, and, panting with a fixed stare, she yielded to it entirely.

Finally, the sense of reality returned.

"Johann," she said, "I must save him, do you hear? And in order to do so, you must help me."

"What danger do you fear?"

"Manuel's death. Child, I will be eternally grateful to you, if you can avert the peril. I will be your slave; I will serve you as a dog serves its master. . . ."

"What is to be done?" asked Johann, irresistibly attracted by Zilla's accent.

She took from her wrist a silver bracelet and used the point of a stiletto which she always carried on her person, to scratch on the metal some characters, the meaning of which Johann did not know, but which to Manuel, accustomed to write as well as to speak the Romany tongue, contained a revelation and put him on his guard against Roland's criminal attempts.

Johann, scarcely allowing Zilla time to finish, repeated his question:

"What is to be done?"

"Give this to the prisoner," she said, giving him the bracelet, "and do not give it to him to-morrow, not even this evening, but at once.

"Alas! Is he still alive?" sighed Zilla, in her anguish. Johann had taken the bracelet; nevertheless, he seemed to hesitate.

"I am afraid," he ventured, "that I will not be able to do as you ask immediately. I only go down to the cells at noon."

"Go, go quickly, heaven will inspire you."

The youth prepared to depart.

"I will await you," said Zilla. "Return to tell me all, all, do you hear, even the misfortune that I fear."

And, overcome by fatigue as well as emotion, she sank upon the flagging, while Johann hastened to return to the jail.

He vanished from her sight, and the fortune-teller's mind began again to float in that mist of dreams which the agony of waiting creates, when the life of a man may depend upon one minute, well-employed or not well-employed.

For a long time, she remained thus, caring naught for the looks of the passers-by.

She saw before her only the sinister pile of the *châtelêt*, outlined against the gradually darkening sky.

Soon the outlines of the prison became confounded with the sky, then bright beams began to play on the battlements.

It was night, and Zilla was still waiting. She had spent most of the day, sad and pensive, changing her prostrate position only by raising her head from time to time to see if Johann was not coming.

No one came. The night grew darker and darker; curfew rang in the vicinity, and Zilla had provisionally to renounce the hope of knowing the fate of him she loved.

All the springs of her mind relaxed at once; she raised her hands to her breast, which was wrung by keen suffering, and, as she attempted to rise, sudden dizziness forced her to fall back upon the ground.

Zilla was finally overcome, not by her emotion, not by grief, but by Nature. She was hungry, pitiful reality, absurd tyranny, which forced her to think of herself when all her thoughts, all her fears were for another.

Since the night before, the gypsy had eaten nothing. She made one supreme effort, she rose, and, supporting herself by means of the walls which often seemed to recede beneath her trembling hand, she reached the House of Cyclops with great difficulty.

"Ah! where have you come from," asked the old portress, on seeing her thus, pale and tottering, "what accident has happened to you?"

The gypsy made no reply and gathered together the last remnant of her strength to climb the staircase leading to her room.

After eating and resting, Zilla thought she would be as well as she had been; as brave, as ready to resist all circumstances.

That hope was presumptuous. The gypsy, it is true, had regained part of her physical strength, but a chill shook her limbs. That chill, at first superficial, soon penetrated the flesh; she felt chilled to her heart.

She flung herself on her bed, heaped her clothing

and a woolen cape on her shivering body; then she shut her eyes, hoping for sleep and with it oblivion.

But she was too deeply affected to find one moment of rest.

All night she tossed on her bed, a prey to indefinable uneasiness.

During the struggle of her body against the disease which had attacked it, her mind sustained a still more terrible combat with itself.

Zilla thought that her love had made her commit a great error; in order to protect that love, she had disposed of Manuel's life and liberty.

Could passion, intense, deep as it was, excuse such an abuse?

Instead of going in search of the Count, instead of trying to bend M. Jean de Lamothe's severity, in a word, of seeking Manuel's salvation by the employment of every contingent means, Zilla might have armed herself with a victorious proof and have proclaimed aloud the young man's innocence.

She had Ben-Joel's book; she knew at least where to find it and on what page was that proof.

But to act thus, was to separate herself forever from Manuel, by restoring to him his name and title, and Zilla's selfishness had not been able to persuade itself to such a sacrifice.

Now, she saw quite clearly that her hesitation and her reserve had left the field clear to Count Roland's intrigues.

"If Manuel is dead, at this hour," she said to herself, "it is I, I alone who have killed him."

That horrible thought weighed heavily upon her mind. She vainly tried to reassure herself against her

own conscience; she did not succeed. The logic of facts crushed her.

"Well," she cried at length, as if the judges were there to receive her desperate avowal; "he shall live! I will destroy Count Roland's iniquitous plot; I will restore to Ludovic de Lembrat his father's fortune and the love of her whom he has preferred to me."

The daylight filtered through the large pane of glass in Zilla's window.

She could not delay putting her plans into execution any longer.

Her eyelids were painfully heavy, she could scarcely raise them, she tried to leave the bed on which exhaustion and pain had laid her.

Her head felt as heavy as lead.

She laid back on her pillow, and her temples began to throb violently; it seemed to her at the same time as if a band of iron were pressing her forehead, and as if the balls of her eyes were of fire.

Her eyelids closed; she awaited the end of that attack.

A strange torpor held her captive; she did not dare to move, fearing to provoke another attack of the sudden illness which tortured her.

However, her mind was still clear, and that mind told her broken body to rise and walk.

The gypsy made a sudden leap and flung herself out of bed.

At the very moment she rose, it seemed to her as if she received a violent blow on her forehead.

She was stunned; nevertheless, she extended her arms and essayed to walk in the direction of the piece of furniture in which was Ben-Joël's book.

That was the supreme effort.

Zilla felt herself carried away in a sort of giddy whirlwind; she could not see, she could not hear, she fell heavily upon the floor, uttering a stifled moan.

When the old portress of the House of Cyclops heard noon strike, she was surprised not to have seen Zilla come downstairs.

On the preceding night, she had been struck by the alteration in her features. Although there was little compassion in her nature, she, nevertheless, was uneasy enough to ascend to Zilla's room, and to find out what cause detained her so late.

Zilla still lay on the floor, motionless.

The old woman touched her brow and her hands. Her hands were cold and her brow burning.

With an energy which would not have been believed in her, she took the inert form in her arms and carried or rather dragged it to the bed.

Then she took a ewer from a stand, and thinking Zilla merely in a swoon, she sprinkled her face with water.

Beneath that besprinkling, the gypsy shivered in every limb, but her eyes did not open, and her lips remained mute.

In affright, the portress hastened to the door and summoned assistance.

A doctor soon arrived, brought thither by the gypsies living in the house, and it was with great difficulty that he restored Zilla to consciousness.

The poor girl only recovered consciousness for a few minutes; another attack of fever triumphed over her strength; she grew delirious and the doctor declared her life in danger.

She must be watched constantly; in Ben-Joël's absence, the old portress decided to do it.

During that time, Johann Müller, faithful to the promise given to Zilla, watched for her return in order to tell her what had taken place. That night he had been detained by his duty and had not been able to go out, even for an instant.

He finally grew weary of his long waiting and re-entered the prison, thinking much of the strange girl, so passionate in her tenderness and yet so forgetful.

The details furnished by the young jailer as to the prisoner were perfectly exact.

Until the evening of that day Mannel had seen in his cell only Count Roland, we know on what occasion, and M. Jean de Lamothe.

To him the time passed without fear as well as without hope; he was so thoroughly imbued with the sense of an irremediable misfortune, that his thoughts were as if dead.

His monotonous life was interrupted only by the daily visit of the jailer, who came to bring him his bread and to renew his allowance of water.

An hour after Zilla's visit to the Count, and while she was vainly trying to obtain from the provost the favor of seeing Manuel, a man presented himself at the *châtelet*.

He showed the order given to Roland by M. Jean de Lamothe, and the doors were opened to him.

That man carried a basket, containing two bottles of wine, a fresh loaf and a pie.

Without any questions being asked, he was admitted to Manuel's cell, and left alone with him.

It is almost needless to add that the man was sent by Count Roland.

He had received from his master very minute instructions and of a nature to baffle all suspicion.

When he entered the cell, Manuel, as was his custom, was crouching in a corner. He made no sign, he did not even turn his head on hearing the door of his prison open at that unusual hour.

In about a minute, however, as the newcomer remained motionless before him, Manuel looked at him as well as the doubtful light entering the cell would permit him.

"What do you want with me?" he finally asked.

"Sir," replied the Count's messenger, "a person greatly interested in you bade me give you this."

At the same time, he placed beside Manuel the basket he was carrying, adding, as he did so:

"To-morrow morning, in fact, daily, I will come to replenish these provisions. The grand provost has given me permission."

"Has Count de Lembrat sent you?"

"No, sir," said the man, faithful to his trust.

"Has Cyrano?"

"No. But do not question me. The person wishes to keep the secret."

A ray of enlightenment flashed across Manuel's mind.

"Could it be Gilberte?" he thought.

He then examined the messenger closely, but his features did not recall any familiar face.

"Why keep that secret?" he then objected. "By telling me the name of him or . . . of her who sent you, what do you risk? Is it a woman?"



"Perhaps. But I repeat to you, do not ask me what I cannot tell you. Adieu, sir, or rather, until to-morrow. Nothing shall be wanting henceforth that can mitigate the severity of your captivity."

When Manuel was again alone, he tried to solve the enigma.

Who could be interested in him?

Cyrano, no doubt. But had he not just learned that Cyrano had nothing to do with the delicate attention of which he was the recipient?

Gilberte? He had thought of her for an instant; the mystery enshrouded in the message had given rise to the thought, certainly inadmissible, now that he considered it calmly.

Gilberte was too well guarded, too well watched, to be able to give Manuel such direct evidence of her thoughts of him.

Zilla remained. Manuel knew her to be guilty and felt that she was jealous; still, he did not believe her incapable of a certain generosity which the calculations of her selfishness had not entirely destroyed.

Manuel, moreover, enlightened by Ben-Joël's words, was right to believe in Zilla's affection, and if he knew very well why the gypsy had participated in his ruin, he knew a well that she might interest herself in his situation and seek means to lighten it.

In short, he wished to explain the mysterious messenger's course, and, for lack of better, he attributed the inspiration to Zilla.

He then felt curious to examine the food brought him, thinking he might find a skilfully hidden note, and in that note the explanation sought for.

He broke the bread, rummaged in the basket, and

found nothing, the Count having refrained from making use of Zilla's letter.

He then pushed aside the food, whose appetizing odor no longer tempted him.

Toward noon, however, at the time he was in the habit of eating his meal, he stretched out his hand toward the white bread, offered him in exchange for his coarse loaf, broke off a piece and ate it.

Then he cut the pie, and had already eaten two or three mouthfuls of it, when the door again opened.

Johann Müller appeared, set a lighted lantern on a stone which jutted out into the cell, and put a loaf and a jug of water within Manuel's reach, saying:

"A good appetite, sir. I am pleased to see that you did not have to await me for dinner to-day."

"Thanks, my friend," replied Manuel, with a sad smile. "Could you tell me to whom I owe . . ."

"I do not know. But do you recognize this?"

Having spoken those words, Johann took up his lantern, and in its light, before Manuel's eyes, sparkled the silver bracelet sent by Zilla.

With an astonishment, easy to comprehend, the young man seized the trinket, which was perfectly familiar to him.

He thought he had found the explanation of the preceding facts.

"It is indeed Zilla!" he reflected, aloud.

"There is some writing on it," again explained the jailer; "read it quickly, and if I can be of any use to you . . ."

Then only, did Manuel perceive the characters traced on the circlet of silver.

He deciphered them without difficulty, turned somewhat pale and murmured:

"If she speaks the truth, I am lost."

"What is it?" asked Johann.

"Nothing," replied the prisoner, rereading Zilla's message.

The words of that message were startling.

The gypsy warned Mannel against all surprises; she told him of the poison stolen by the Count, and begged him not to touch the food which had been brought to him that very morning to the prison by a strange man.

But Manuel had tasted some of the food.

"I am lost," he repeated.

However, Mannel suffered no pain, and the poison he had been warned against did not keep its victims waiting thus.

"Zilla is mistaken," thought he.

His eyes then fell upon the basket, in which side by side lay two bottles of wine still intact.

He took one of them, broke the neck on the corner of a stove, and, dipping his finger in the liquid, he let one drop, one only, fall on his lips.

He immediately experienced a burning sensation and flung far from him the bottle, which broke into pieces on the ground.

After which, he took up his jug and drank some water.

Johann, perplexed, watched his actions.

"What is it?" he ventured to ask.

"It has just been proven to me once more, my friend, that I am indeed Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat. Tell that to the man who came here this morn-

ing, and bid him repeat my words to his master. It will suffice to prevent his coming here again. As for you, you may rest assured that I shall never forget the service you have just done me in bringing me this bracelet."

"A service?"

"You have simply saved my life."

"What, was that wine . . .?"

"Say nothing about all this; confine yourself to the commission with which I have charged you. Later on, perhaps, I may call for your testimony. And once free, for I shall be free some day, I hope I shall be able to repay your kindness."

When Johann Müller withdrew, having assured Mannel that he would be discreet, the latter took the other bottle of wine and hid it under the floor of his cell.

The following day, the Count's emissary arrived at the *châtelet*, this time with empty hands.

"He had just come," he said, "for news of the prisoner."

Johann answered him, and his answer was what Manuel had dictated to him.

The man, who knew nothing, transmitted it obediently to his master.

The Count uttered an exclamation of anger.

"Did you speak my name to the prisoner?" he asked

"No, my lord, you forbade me."

"Then . . . go!"

The man, frightened at Roland's terrible air, hastily obeyed.

"Who has betrayed me?" wondered the Count,

when alone. "Manuel is alive, and still threatens me from the depths of his cell. To-morrow, perhaps, he will accuse me. It is time to put an end to the tardiness of the grand provost's proceedings."

Roland rang, ordered his carriage, and drove to the house of M. Jean de Lamothe.

## XXXIV.

All these events occurred while Cyrano was detained at Toulonse, while Castillan was travelling over the high-roads, and while Ben-Joël was undertaking to gain possession of the document confided to Jacques Lorgat's care, an enterprise in which he was to succeed, as we have seen.

When the Bohemian, glad to escape from Jacques' firmid grasp, found that he was at a distance sufficient to insure his safety,—he sat down by the roadside and began to consider his situation.

It presaged him nothing good!

He had scarcely any money. He knew nothing about Rinaldo, and were he to succeed in rejoining the latter, it would be to hear him reproach him for his awkwardness.

Moreover, he knew nothing of the presence of the true Castillan at Saint-Sernin.

When he had meditated for some time, he arrived at the conclusion that the best thing to do, under the circumstances, was to turn back to Paris and to effect a union with Rinaldo, if it were possible.

De Lembrat's prudent valet had not left his associate without planning the course of his return. That course he was to follow if circumstances obliged him to return to Perigord.

Ben-Joël started out, without suspecting the agreeable surprise awaiting him a short distance off.

He had been on the way scarcely two hours, indeed,

when on the horizon he saw a horseman coming toward him at full speed. Instinctively the Bohemian halted. When that horseman, slackening his horse's pace, was within gun-shot, Ben-Joël uttered a cry of delight.

He had recognized Rinaldo.

Count de Lembrat's proxy, having played his famous scene as the police-officer at Colignac, had continued his journey.

His plan was to go to Saint-Sernin first to learn there of Ben-Joël's success, and then to go on to Gardannes, where he was not sorry to cast a glance as future proprietor at the fine farm which Roland had promised him as the just reward for his services.

Ben-Joël's cry of delight was answered by an exclamation from Rinaldo.

He alighted, and, extending his hand to his companion, said :

"Well, I hope it is all done?"

Ben-Joël assumed a contrite air, as he corrected :

"Done? I should hope not."

And, putting his defeat in the light which could excuse or warrant it, he related the scene of that morning to Rinaldo.

"Clown!" cried Rinaldo. "You were in too big a hurry."

"It was essential to hurry. The curé expects Cyrano at any minute."

"He will expect him a long time."

Rinaldo, in his turn, explained. He briefly narrated his achievements, and Ben-Joël was forced to confess that he had, indeed, been too hasty.

"However," he concluded, "I have nothing to re-

proach myself with, I did not know that Bergerac could no longer interfere with my plans. On the other hand, I had Castillan's arrival to fear."

"The master, if I am not mistaken, is not as much to be feared at this moment as the servant. Consequently, we will make another attempt and make an end of it. We will set out this evening for Saint-Sernin."

The two associates entered an inn and ordered something to eat.

Night gradually fell. It was dark when Rinaldo and Ben-Joël had finished their meal.

At that moment, two horses going at a furious pace, flew along the road and attracted their attention.

They caught a confused glimpse of two dark forms leaning over the horses' necks and urging them madly on.

"Those people are in a great hurry," Rinaldo contented himself with saying, as he drained his glass for the last time. "Let us do as they are, friend Ben-Joël, do not let us lose time; I will explain to you, *en route*, how I count on terminating this adventure."

The valet took Ben-Joël behind him, and the two men turned in the direction of Saint-Sernin.

It would take them an hour to reach there at a leisurely pace.

On the way, they conversed.

"What is your plan?" Ben-Joël ventured to ask.

"It is very simple. Are you familiar with the curé's house?"

"From top to bottom, and to the remotest corner."

"Do you know where de Lembrat's document is?"

"In a cupboard, behind Longuépée's bed."



"Very well! The thing to do will be to get the curé out of his house, to-night, and to profit by his absence to search the cupboard in question."

"To get him out of his house? That will be difficult."

"Why? Does he not belong to his parishioners, and if he is called to the bedside of one of them, will he refuse to go?"

"In order to deceive him thus, it would be necessary to know some one at Saint-Sernin, and we know no one there."

"There is an inn there."

"Yes, but I do not see . . ."

"Before reaching the inn," continued Rinaldo, imperturbably, "I will wrap you in my cloak. You will only open your mouth to utter a few moans. Then, I will have you carried to a bed; I will say that I found you dying on the road, at some distance from here, and I will ask for a priest to assist at your last moments."

"I understand," said Ben-Joël. "The curé will arrive full of zeal; we will await him behind the door of the room, and we will stab him."

"One moment. The curé is stout!"

"A veritable Hercules."

"In that case, no stabbing. We would only fail in that, and all would be lost. From the first, we must prevent him from crying out and make it impossible for him to give the alarm. Let me arrange it all. Moreover, I do not wish to shed blood for which sooner or later I might be called to account; that would annoy me greatly, especially in this country where I intend to settle."

"As you please!" agreed Ben-Joël, who left all pretensions to the management of the affair in Rinaldo's hands.

It was ten o'clock at night when our adventurers arrived in the vicinity of Saint-Sernin.

"Where is the inn?" then asked Rinaldo.

"On the place de l'Église."

"It is both a long way off and quite near, a long way off for folks in haste to procure a lodging, quite near the curé's dwelling. We might find a better!"

Ben-Joël made no reply; his eyes peered into the darkness around him.

"See there!" said he, very soon, pointing to a faint light which glimmered in the distance.

"That light?"

"Yes; it comes from an isolated house, skirting the road. Do not let us go too far."

Rinaldo followed that advice and stopped his horse. He then alighted, in order to prepare for the part which he proposed to play.

Ben-Joël was rolled in Rinaldo's cloak and laid upon the horse, which its master took by the bridle and led toward the house.

That house was of modest appearance, low, covered with moss-grown tiles and cracked all over.

Rinaldo knocked hurriedly at the door, saying:

"If you are a good Christian, open, open quickly."

The owner of the house was poor enough not to fear the attacks of thieves, so that call, although somewhat imperious, did not render him uneasy.

He opened the door, and, raising above his head the lamp which lighted his hut, he asked:

"What do you want?"

"Shelter for the night," replied Rinaldo. "I am going to Fougerolles; on the road, at about a half league from here, I found this poor devil stretched out in the middle of the road. If he is not dead, he is not much better."

"Come in," said the peasant, simply.

Speaking thus, he kindly lent his aid to Rinaldo and took in his arms Ben-Joël's rigid form, which he carried into the cabin and laid gently on a bed of leaves.

At that moment, Ben-Joël, clever actor as he was, moaned feebly.

"He is not dead," said the peasant, "he must be relieved. Do you know what ails him? Is he hurt?"

"No," said Rinaldo; "I think it is an apoplectic fit. The best thing to do, just now, I believe, would be to go in search of a priest.

"But, tell me," he added, "have you not a better bed to give to the sufferer? I will pay you for this trouble."

"I have no other bed than that. Excuse me."

"Very well, my friend. Your good-will shall be taken into account. Let us now think of the salvation of this soul."

"You are right. I will fetch the curé."

"If you please," said Rinaldo.

And leaning over Ben-Joël's body, he added:

"Go quickly. He is very low."

The peasant obeyed.

When he had disappeared, Ben-Joël sat up, saying:

"It seems to me, friend Rinaldo, that this is a very risky action."

"Do you think so?"

“Undoubtedly. This good man will surely be against us, and will defend his curé.”

“We will manage to get him out of the way. Stay where you are and listen to me.”

In a few words, Rinaldo unfolded his plan; then he took pains to ensure its execution.

The two bandits soon found what was necessary to them; a half-hour passed, during which they were enabled to prepare for the curé's visit.

In order to engage in an enterprise as perilous as theirs, it was essential to be, like them, trained in all the artifices of a life on highways, and prompt to employ expedients apparently the most unacceptable.

Against them, they had Jacques' well-known strength, and for them the advantage of a situation which would arouse no suspicion in their victim.

That compensation sufficed to give them confidence. Rinaldo opened the door noiselessly and listened. A murmur of voices was soon heard.

“We have succeeded,” muttered the valet. “Friend Ben-Joël, do not forget your rôle.”

Then, as if yielding to impatience, he opened the door wide, and took several steps on the way to meet the curé and his guide.

“Well, sir,” said Jacques, addressing Rinaldo, “how is your sick man?”

“He does not speak, he does not stir, but I think he still can hear. Pardon me, sir, for having disturbed you at this hour.”

“If I have come in time, all is well.”

“Come, then,” said Rinaldo. “As for you, my dear fellow,” he continued, slipping a gold piece into the peasant's hand, “please be kind enough to see to my

horse. I saw near your house a shed, in which the animal will do very well for to-night. Take off the bridle and give it a drink."

"I will do my best," said the peasant, bewildered by the traveler's liberality.

And he left Rinaldo to enter his house with Jacques, while he went away to do as he had been asked.

The curé entered the hut without mistrust. Dimly lighted up by the lamp, Ben-Joël lay motionless on the bed of leaves.

His black hair hung in his face and the lower part of his body was enveloped in a large cloak, on which lay his arms ready to seize their awaited prey. Jacques could scarcely distinguish the objects in the room.

Rinaldo pointed to the bed, saying:

"There is the man, sir."

Longuépée kneeled down and bent over the supposed dying man, saying in his strong voice:

"Do you hear me, brother?"

With a movement as quick as thought, Ben-Joël raised his arms, and his sinewy fingers clutched the curé's throat.

At the same time Rinaldo flung himself on Longuépée, who was unable to defend himself, owing to his kneeling posture, passed around his body sort of lasso, and while Ben-Joël continued to hold him, suffocated, between fingers as inflexible as steel cramp-irons, he bound his legs and his arms.

By a common movement, the bodies of the three men were occasionally raised by violent starts, but Ben-Joël did not relax his hold, and Rinaldo continued his work.

Gradually the violence of the curé's struggles de-

creased; his eyeballs, becoming bloodshot, seemed ready to start from their sockets, and his respiration was labored, from the pressure on his throat.

Rinaldo then gagged him.

The struggle had lasted scarcely one minute.

Jacques finally succumbed.

Ben-Joël and Rinaldo threw him on the bed; they had nothing more to fear from him.

“Now, the other,” commanded Rinaldo.

Both men went out. They met the peasant. With him, they took less precaution. The peasant was, moreover, an old man, incapable of offering serious resistance. Without speaking a word, Rinaldo flung his cloak over his head, threw him down and calmly gagged him, while Ben-Joël bound his feet and his hands securely.

That task achieved, the old man was carried into the shed and placed on the litter, not far from Rinaldo's horse.

“You have nothing to fear,” the man whispered to him, as he went out; “sleep peacefully until to-morrow, my good fellow.”

And leaving behind him his horse, which would only have been in his way on that occasion, the valet said to Ben-Joël:

“The field is clear. To the vicarage, partner, and quickly, too!”

XXXV.

QUIET reigned round about Saint-Sernin. The village itself was wrapped in the deepest silence; no lights burned in the windows, and as the night was dark, it was necessary to know the roads very well in order not to lose one's way.

Ben-Joël acted as guide to his companion. They arrived at the place de l'Église, without having met a living soul. Scarcely fifty paces separated them from the vicarage.

Before venturing on an attack whose result, according to their belief, could not fail to be decisive, the two adventurers held a consultation.

Two ways of entering the place were open to them; the door and the window. The door was solid, of thick oak, and very probably it would resist their efforts. They could, with propriety, knock at the door and have it opened by the servant whom they could easily deal with.

But a woman's cries might attract the attention of the neighbors and set a goodly share of the villagers upon Ben-Joël and Rinaldo.

The window remained.

That window, Ben-Joël was perfectly familiar with. It was through it, that very morning, that he had issued, or rather that he had been abruptly put out of the curé's house.

It was very easy of access. Moreover, which was a great advantage in the matter, it opened into the curé's own room.

"Come," concluded Rinaldo, to whom Ben-Joël had made the explanations we have just read, "do not let us lose time: let us scale it."

"We will need some light," remarked the Bohemian.

"I have thought of that."

"Have you a lantern?"

"No! but I have a tinder-box, and down yonder, in the cabin where you played your rôle so well, I took some stalks of hemp which will suffice us until we shall have found a lamp."

"Come then, I will enter first."

They stole along to the foot of the vicarage wall.

Then Rinaldo rendered Ben-Joël the same service which, on another occasion, Castillan rendered Marotte, that is to say he lent him his back in order that he might reach the window.

The Bohemian drew himself up by main force, and, once erect, not without difficulty on the stone ledge he bore his entire weight on the window-frame.

The window, weakened as it was by the rough treatment given it recently by the curé, opened abruptly.

At the same moment there was a movement within the room, which passed unnoticed by Ben-Joël, who was busy.

"Now, it is your turn!" said the Bohemian, extending his arms toward Rinaldo.

Ben-Joël was strong; de Lembrat's valet was not afraid to trust to his strength; he stood up in order to seize his companion's two hands; the latter lifted him, Rinaldo's feet being braced against the wall, and drew him up to him.

"To work!" he then said.



While Ben-Joël groped in the darkness and found a lamp on a table, Rinaldo struck the tinder and produced a light by means of a hemp stalk.

Instinctively, the lamp once lighted, the two men cast a glance around them.

The bed curtains were drawn, but they seemed to stir slightly,—no doubt that was caused by the night air coming through the open window.

With his finger, Ben-Joël pointed out the oaken cupboard to his acolyte.

“Is it there?” asked Rinaldo.

“Yes.”

Ben-Joël took the lamp and turned toward the bed. Rinaldo followed him.

Suddenly, they both stopped, petrified.

The bed curtains had moved, and that time it was not the wind which stirred them.

At the same time, a sound like the cocking of a pistol, was heard at the end of the room.

Rinaldo paused, detained Ben-Joël and half-drew his dagger.

He looked at the bed as a huntsman in search of game looks at a thicket from which he expects to see the game emerge.

Silence again reigned in the room.

And, like a huntsman mistaken in his calculations, Rinaldo murmured :

“It is nothing.”

As he turned to advance again, the bed curtains separated, violently that time, and a satirical face appeared, while a voice said at the same time :

“Well, sirs, decide; I have been looking at you a quarter of an hour to learn the object of your kind visit.”

With those words, Cyrano leaped out of bed, his sword in one hand, a pistol in the other, and advanced toward the two bandits.

They fled to the other end of the room, unable to utter a word of menace or of supplication, so startled were they at the sudden apparition.

"Jacques! Jacques!" then cried Cyrano.

Rinaldo and Ben-Joël had by that time regained their composure.

"Do not call the curé," sneered the latter; "he is busy elsewhere."

"Ah!" exclaimed de Lembrat's valet, "it is a piece of good fortune to meet you here, M. de Cyrano."

And, slyly, he took a pistol from his belt, aimed at the nobleman and fired.

A long, bleeding scratch appeared on Cyrano's cheek. He saw that death was imminent.

As he rushed toward the window to cut off his assailants' retreat, he pressed the trigger of his pistol, almost mechanically and without aiming.

A cry of rage stifled by a groan replied to the explosion of the weapon.

Then a body fell heavily upon the floor.

Before Cyrano could tell which of his enemies he had just felled, the lamp was thrown down and went out.

The nobleman took the defensive and waited.

The darkness around him was silent, the faint moans uttered by the wounded man could scarcely be heard.

"Come, surrender," said the poet.

The sound of a footstep gliding furtively across the floor was the sole reply to those words.

The man who was walking thus, seemed to be going toward the door.

Cyrano stamped his foot.

A voice from the lower floor answered him. In another minute the door opened, and Castellan, lamp in hand, appeared.

"It took a long time to awaken you," cried Cyrano, angrily.

Sulpice had no time to reply.

Ben-Joël rushed toward him to open a way for himself, knife in hand, and to attempt to escape by means of the staircase.

Castellan held his lamp up to his face, for lack of a better weapon.

Blinded by the light, burned by the flame, Ben-Joël retreated a step, and literally fell into the arms of Cyrano, who held him tight, calling to Castellan :

"Help me."

The secretary put down the lamp, and in his turn fell upon the Bohemian, who, in a moment, was disarmed and bound in such a manner that he could no longer cause his conquerors the least anxiety.

It was then only that Cyrano could turn to Rinaldo. The valet was lying with his face on the floor; which, in his vicinity, was red with blood.

"Is he dead?" asked the poet. "That would be a pity; we could have made him speak."

The wounded man uttered a low moan.

Cyrano lifted him in his arms and opened his clothes. Rinaldo had been struck in the left side by Cyrano's bullet.

"He is lost!" murmured the latter, who understood wounds. "Let us try, however, to make him come to."

The dying man was laid on the bed; after which Cyrano began to grow uneasy about the curé.

"Where is Jacques?" he asked. "Has not all the noise we have made here awakened him?"

Castillan ran to the small room which Jacques had taken in order to leave his room at Cyrano's disposal.

We know in advance that he found it empty. Cyrano understood or guessed what had happened. He took another pistol, loaded it, and approaching Ben-Joël, lying on the floor, he said to him coolly:

"Where is the curé? If you do not answer, in less time than it takes to say a *Pater*, by my faith, I will shoot you through the brain."

Ben-Joël was in no position to resist; Cyrano's glance, still more than his words told him that the threat was not lightly made.

He confessed all.

The governess and Marotte soon entered the room. Castillan undertook to go with them to free Jacques; as for Cyrano, he stayed alone to watch the prisoner and the wounded man, to whom out of humanity he showed some care.

The explanation of Savinien's unexpected return can be given here.

Shut up in the prison at Toulouse, he would probably have remained there for a long time, thanks to the slowness of the proceedings and to the obscurity of the facts, had not the first act of the play which had brought him there, taken place before M. de Colignac.

The latter, on returning from the chase at Cussan, did not fail to learn from the bailiff the state of affairs.

Master Cadignan, proud of his capture, did not need to be urged to relate all, including his prisoner's escape.

For three days, Colignac was satisfied.

On the morning of the fourth day, the bailiff came to see him, and with a satisfaction he took no pains to hide, he said to the nobleman:

"You see, sir, that I was right in warning you against your guest. He is surely a great criminal, as the magistrates of Toulouse will prove to you."

"What do you mean? Cyrano is safe from your nonsense, I suppose."

"You are mistaken! He escaped from Colignac, but he was recaptured at Toulouse, where they are keeping him in prison, pending the burning of him at the stake."

"May the devil burn you!" cried the nobleman.

And, forthwith, having unceremoniously dismissed the bailiff, he ordered his carriage and set out in haste for Toulouse.

His influence was great. In a few days he was at naught Rinaldo's work, and had obtained Rinaldo's liberty.

All those misadventures had greatly vexed the latter, besides having caused him to lose valuable time.

His friend replenished his purse, which the lawyers had drained to the last pistole, gave him a horse and started him off for Saint-Sernin.

Marotte met him on the way and knew him at once from the description Castellan had given her of his master.

Besides, she questioned him fearlessly, told him the object of her journey and had no trouble in convincing

him that they must increase their speed in order to reach the curé's in good season.

The gypsy and the poet arrived at Saint-Sernin that very night. It was they, who, during supper, Ben-Joël and Rinaldo had seen pass along the road on horseback, and whom he had not recognized.

Now, with Ben-Joël taken prisoner and Rinaldo dying, Savinien might well think himself master of the situation.

He did not forget, however, that he would still have a great deal to contend against in order to assure Manuel's deliverance and Roland's confusion.

But the struggle did not trouble him. Had he not regained possession of Count de Lembrat's document, that sovereign weapon with which he had threatened Roland?

\* \* \* \* \*

It was an hour after midnight, when Castillan returned with the curé.

Jacques was ashamed of his defeat; he had allowed himself to be tricked like a child by two villains.

Cyrano consoled himself with the thought that the hypocrisy of which he had been the dupe had become reality.

Several hours before, Jacques had been summoned to the bedside of a dying man who was well; he was now to assist at the last moments of the author of that sacrilegious strategy.

Ben-Joël was put in a small vault without windows, where he was bidden to patiently await Cyrano's pleasure, and the three men, that is to say, Savinien, Jacques and Castillan, gathered around Rinaldo's bed.

An instant before, the valet had regained conscious-

ness, and his wild eyes roved from one to the other of those present. Undoubtedly, his mind, clouded by the approach of death, would not permit him to exactly grasp his situation.

Perhaps he thought he was dreaming and mistook those speaking and moving around him for creations of his brain.

Cyrano held him as if fascinated beneath his glance, the fixedness of which ended in restoring the dying man to the true sense of his condition.

His eyes lighted up, a frown knit his brows, and he heaved a deep sigh.

He was suffering, and with suffering reason returned.

"M. de Cyrano," he began, in a voice so weak that it was but a vague whisper to the ears of the witnesses of that scene.

Savinien approached and, placing his hand on that of the valet to make him understand that he was dealing with a man and not a shadow, he said, in a solemn voice,

"Rinaldo, you are about to die. Reconcile yourself with God; He will give you enough time, I hope, that you may make amends for your injustice toward mankind!"

It was now Jacques' turn to address the wounded man, whose condition was growing worse each minute.

Castellan and Savinien retired for an instant, and the priest heard Rinaldo's confession.

At the moment when the bandit felt the world slipping from him, when he caught a glimpse of doubtful eternity, his soul was bowed beneath the weight of tardy remorse.

The gulf was there, yawning; before falling into it, the man felt the need of freeing himself from the formidable burden of purifying his heart and of hearing a compassionate voice murmur in his ear those words of hope and of faith at which he had so often scoffed.

His lips, accustomed to blasphemy, instinctively murmured a prayer, and he looked at the priest with the anxiety of the culprit who awaits the supreme moment of indulgence or of malediction.

When the wounded man had answered all Jacques' questions, when the priest's lips had murmured one last benediction, Castillan and Savinien were again called into the room.

"This man dies repentant and pardoned," said the curé to them, "what do you wish him to do now?"

"Can you write?" Savinien asked the dying man.

Rinaldo made a sign in the negative.

"Can you sign your name?" continued the poet.

"Yes," replied the valet.

"You will, in that case, dictate your testament."

The wounded man smiled bitterly.

"You should say my confession."

"Precisely. Before appearing before God, you will leave in my hands an avowal of the criminal enterprises of which Count Roland de Lembrat has been the instigator and you the instrument; you will attest the existence of the proofs of Manuel's innocence, of those proofs which the Count has put out of the way, and you will leave this world with a clear conscience, knowing that you have bequeathed to us a means of repairing the wrong in which you have participated."

Rinaldo collected his strength in order to make the confession required of him.



He related all that had taken place since Manuel's entrance into his brother's house; he exposed all the plots and laid bare all his master's secrets.

While he spoke, Castillan wrote.

When all was finished, Cyrano read over slowly the *résumé* of the confession and handed it to Rinaldo, who put his signature at the end of it with an unsteady hand.

"Bring in Ben-Joël," the poet then bade his secretary.

Castillan obeyed, and reappeared at the expiration of an instant, pushing the Bohemian before him.

"Read this," said Savinien to him, harshly, putting Rinaldo's declaration before his eyes.

"I will read whatsoever you like," agreed the knave with the remarkable docility he always exhibited when he felt that he was in hands stronger than his.

And he read.

"Sign, now, you as well," continued the poet.

"I will sign whatsoever you like," replied the Bohemian, faithful to his respectful formula.

"Here," then said Cyrano to Jacques; "take care of this writing; it will be useful to us some day."

The curé, who never questioned his friend's plans, took the confession, folded it, and without speaking put it in the pocket of his short cassock.

"My lord," Ben-Joël ventured to ask, addressing Cyrano, "what will you do with me?"

"I will have you arrested."

The wretch began to tremble, and his knees bent as if he were about to fall at the poet's feet.

"Coward! you are afraid," said the latter, scornfully. "Come, rest easy; you can yet save your skin."

"How?" exclaimed Ben-Joël, who clung longingly to that hope.

"By giving me the book of your tribe."

"I will give it to you," the Bohemian hastened to say.

"Well; it is in Paris, is it not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"We will leave then to-morrow in your charming company. Castillan, take away this man."

"Then, going up to Longuépée, who had resumed his watch at Rinaldo's bedside, he asked:

"Have you hope?"

"I hope that God has pardoned him," replied the priest, in a grave voice.

Savinien looked at Rinaldo. His head was bowed on his breast. De Lembrat's valet was dead.

On the next day he was interred in the cemetery at Saint-Sernin, not far from the "beautiful farm" whose proprietor he had dreamed of becoming.

Ben-Joël, very ill at ease in his vault, reflected during that time on the vicissitudes of his destiny and nursed new plans.

He thirsted more than ever for vengeance. His cupidity even yielded to the hatred with which Cyrano had inspired him.

"My dear Jacques," said Cyrano to the curé, as he announced his approaching departure to him, "I invite you to the marriage of Ludovic de Lembrat with Mlle. Gilberte de Faventines; still better, I wish for you to pronounce the nuptial benediction. Arrange, therefore, to go to Paris in two weeks. I will offer you hospitality there in my turn."

The curé offered some resistance; then he pledged his word, and Cyrano could leave contented.

Ben-Joël was fastened on Rinaldo's horse, which was coupled to Castillan's; the latter was especially charged to watch the Bohemian, and the small caravan set out for Paris.

We must not neglect to say that Marotte was of the party.

She had asked Cyrano's permission to go with him, and the poet, charmed by her cheerfulness as well as her devotion, had readily given his consent.

On seeing Marotte appear, at the moment of departure, Ben-Joël cast at her one of those glances full of anger which say more than words.

The dancer shrugged her shoulders and cast a glance and a meaning smile at Castillan, which succeeded in making the gallant secretary forget the personage who had duped him at Romorantin.

Cyrano had recovered his good-humor. He wished to pass through Colignac. The itinerary would not make his route any longer, and he wanted to have the pleasure of thanking his friend for the service rendered him, and of once more greeting Master Cadignan, his particular enemy.

## XXXVI.

ONE alone among the travelers remained taciturn and moody: it was Ben-Joël.

The master-knave cherished the hope, perhaps chimerical, of making up to his companions for his enforced politeness, and that as soon as possible.

In order to be avenged on Cyrano, the surest means he thought was to fall back on Count Roland.

He calculated on finding the latter favorably disposed, notwithstanding the utter failure of the expedition to Saint-Sernin.

The Count had need of a damned soul, and Rinaldo dead, the Bohemian, without being too presumptuous, could aspire to that position.

Quite a distance still separated Cyrano from Manuel's prison.

By making good use of his time, he might neutralize the poet's operations, and return defeat for defeat.

Such were Ben-Joël's thoughts as he rode beside Castillan; in order to undertake his new adventure, he must regain his liberty.

It was of that he was thinking.

Being cognizant of Cyrano's intentions with regard to his visit to Colignac, he waited his opportunity until then and, during the first stages of the journey, tried to inspire in his custodians the greatest confidence in his submission.

Castillan, not at all worried about him, and diverted

by Marotte's presence, thought he might relax his vigilance somewhat, and he relaxed so much, that on arriving at the borough of Colignac, the secretary and bandit appeared like two boon companions walking carelessly side by side.

The halt was made at the Castle, where Colignac received Savinien and his suite with great pomp.

Nothing was talked of in the town but the "sorcerer's" arrival; the strong-minded assembled once again at Landriot's tavern, and M. Cadignan, fearing Cyrano's vengeance, bolted his door and supplied his larder with provisions in case he should be able to sustain a siege.

All alarm was vain. Cyrano had other thoughts than those of vengeance.

Landriot's friends were left to their conference, as was Cadignan to his precautions. Savinien passed through Colignac and by the jail without seeming to remember the events which had happened a few days before.

When the gentlemen were settled in their apartments, Ben-Joël was given into the charge of the servants of the Castle, to whom Colignac promised the halter if they let him escape.

Castillan, relieved of all care, was able to enjoy Count de Colignac's hospitality. He was given a seat at the table, near Marotte, whose charms had captivated the two lords, and who was the life of the party.

Neither Cyrano nor Colignac were prejudiced against the nomadic race to which Marotte belonged.

Moreover, if a woman was pretty, it required no more in their sight to endow her with the claim to nobility.

The Bohemian was in the pantry, in a small room which he could not leave without passing through the kitchen filled with people, and he was as safely immured as in an underground vault.

As Cyrano did not intend to allow his prisoner to die of starvation, an excellent supper was served to Ben-Joël, of which the servants who guarded him, partook.

When the dessert was brought in, when the wine had risen to their heads and made them lively, Ben-Joël undertook to win his custodians' sympathy.

He had, as they say, more than one sly trick in his sack. He juggled, he told witty stories, he entertained his audience, which, for a long time had not been to such a *fête* with slight-of-hand.

Life was very monotonous in that old castle, at the extreme end of Languedoc, and Colignac's servants were excusable for enjoying a little unexpected amusement.

They drank largely of it, and the steward, the oracle of the company, gravely declared that "M. Ben-Joël" could not be a bad man, having, as he had, the secret of making folks laugh so that they dispelled their spleen.

"Eh! yes," said the Bohemian, "I do not know why M. de Bergerac suspects me. I am accompanying him to Paris to render him a slight service, and because we have not always been good friends, he fancies that I wish to escape him."

"I am sure you have not the least desire to!" said the steward, indulgently.

"Not the least. Moreover, I should be very foolish to wish to escape. They have given me a good horse,

they have given me good food, and it does not cost me one cent. If I wished to escape from M. de Cyrano, I should do so at Paris. Until then, it is not so bad. I should lose too much."

"He is right!" concluded the steward, evidently convinced by that logic.

"Make yourself easy," added Ben-Joël, smiling upon the assembly, "I will not be the cause of your hanging."

The night was far advanced.

"Come," advised the steward, "M. de Cyrano intends to set out at daybreak. Even this treat must end; we must retire."

"Are they going to leave me here?" asked the Bohemian.

"They are not so barbarous. You will sleep near me, in a small room adjoining mine, and I think that you will be wise and not seek to escape."

"On my honor, I swear it!" said Ben-Joël, with extreme dignity, for a falsehood was nothing to him.

"Come, then."

The Bohemian followed his guide, and with him entered a suite of rooms, opening on the court of the castle, where the steward occupied three rooms.

The first was a sort of vestibule at the end of which was a room communicating with the small room of which the confiding servant had spoken.

The steward flung a mattress into that room, and said to Ben-Joël:

"You will not be very uncomfortable for one night. Good-night, my boy."

With those words, he retired, and Ben-Joël heard the sound of a key turning discreetly in the lock.

He was locked in. His guardian's faith in him had not been so great as to neglect that precaution.

Instead of lying down as he had been told to, Ben-Joël seated himself on a stool and waited.

Loud snoring coming from the other room soon told him that the steward was sound asleep.

Then he approached the door and, by the aid of the lamp which had been left him, he carefully examined the lock.

It was screwed on on his side, which caused him great satisfaction.

He poured a little oil from the lamp on the screws, in order to render the delicate operation he was about to perform easier; then, with great precaution and extraordinary dexterity, he commenced his work.

His dagger with its short, stout blade, served him as a screw-driver.

The sleeper's snores grew louder and singularly favored the Bohemian's venturesome task.

The four screws holding the lock to the panel of the door soon yielded.

Ben-Joël held his lamp near the keyhole. The key had been taken out.

He breathed more freely. That simple detail, of which he had not thought at first, had made him uneasy for an instant, for it might render useless the expenditure of skill, by preventing him from taking off the lock altogether.

The piece of iron, relieved of its screws and managed by Ben-Joël's discreet hand, was softly removed from the wood to which it had been fastened.

The Bohemian was free,—free at least to leave his cell. Before opening the door which would lead him



into the steward's room, he listened attentively. No sound reached his ear, except his neighbor's snores, with which he was already familiar.

Ben-Joël turned the door noiselessly on its hinges, crossed the room with stealthy tread, and reached the door of the vestibule.

It was simply latched. The key was on the outside. As a precautionary means, the Bohemian, once in the vestibule, double-locked his host in and hastened into the court-of-honor.

It was not alone necessary to get out of his cell, but it was also necessary to get out of the castle.

The walls were high and overlooked moats full of water. Behind the structure was a garden protected in the same way. It was to that side Ben-Joël turned his steps, hoping to find an exit easily.

The night was clear, and the moonlight made it as easy to distinguish objects as in broad daylight.

Stealing cautiously along in the shadow of the trees, Ben-Joël reached the end of the garden.

In the distance, before him, lay the fields, and a tiny river glistening like a silver mirror.

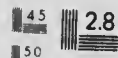
Arrived at that point, he leaned forward to look into the moat and saw at a short distance a sluice perpendicular with the enclosing wall and consequently crossing the entire breadth of the moat. By reaching the first stone of the sluice, the fugitive, as nimble as a cat, could clear the dangerous passage with dry feet.

But the great question was to reach that stone. There were no clefts in the wall, no rough places, no trees stretching their branches over the abyss.



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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2000



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Ben-Joël measured with his eye the distance which separated him from the sluice. It was twenty-five feet at least, and our character thought too much of his bones to risk such a leap. He returned to the garden; impatience and anxiety began to steal over him.

Ben-Joël sought for and found what he needed. In one corner of the garden, along the parapet, his foot struck against a heap of pine, no doubt proceeding from a recent felling, for the bark was still fresh.

The wood, intended for the use of the castle, was in its original length. It was, as they say in those parts, in "shears," or in rods.

Ben-Joël measured one of the longest; it was almost fifteen feet long, three-fifths of the distance to be cleared.

"Diavolo!" said the Bohemian, finding himself disappointed thus, "I believe I shall have trouble in getting out of here."

However, he lifted the pole he had selected and drew it to the centre of the *allée*.

Then, he took another of similar length and tried to fasten it to the first one. For that he had neither ropes nor cramp-irons. Fortunately, he found in that unfrequented part of the garden, a sort of strong bindweed. And having cut several sprigs which ran from one tree to the other and formed an inextricable network above his head, he tried to disentangle them and to tie them around the two poles put with two or three large branches of oak forming a sort of foundation indispensable to the solidity of the apparatus.

The operation consumed more than two hours.

When Ben-Joël finished it he stopped to take breath

an instant, again lifted the two poles, leaned them against the parapet and bore his entire weight on the place where they were joined, in order to test their solidity.

Satisfied with the trial, he rolled his improvised ladder to that part of the wall below which lay the stones of the sluice, let it down slowly and succeeded in placing the end of it in the muddy bottom of the moat in which it sunk more than three feet.

The other end barely went beyond the top of the wall.

Ben-Joël detached a stone from the parapet and inserted the head of the pole in the gap in order to prevent the ladder from moving during the aërian flight he was about to attempt.

Those precautions taken, he rushed at one bound upon the parapet, seized the pole with both hands and slid down to the moat, where he gained a foothold on the first stratum of the sluice.

The sluice was made of oak planks, about six inches thick.

The Bohemian, who, in order to escape, felt himself at that moment capable of running against the edge of a sword, boldly went along the narrow way, crossed it, with arms outstretched like an acrobat on his rope, and reached the bank, safe and sound.

He was certainly saved.

He did not have an *eholus* in his pocket, but he cared not. Ben-Joël relied on his audacity and on chance to procure him all he lacked, with a view to his prompt return to Paris.

Meanwhile daybreak had awakened the guests of the Lord of Colignac.

Savinien, who rose first, knocked at Castillan's door and cried :

"Out of bed, lazy bones ! Go in search of the Bohemian. We must set out."

The secretary had but a vague recollection of what had become of his prisoner and where he could find him.

He questioned the servants to whose care Ben-Joël had been entrusted on the preceding eve : they pointed out to Castillan the steward's lodgings. On reaching them, the young man heard low oaths in the vestibule.

"Ah ! the traitor ! the traitor !" cried Colignac's servant ; "he bewitched me, sure."

"Open," exclaimed Castillan.

"It is easy to say : open ; I am locked in. Free me." The clerk turned the key in the lock, and the steward's disconcerted face appeared in the frame of the door.

"The prisoner ?" asked Sulpice.

"Has gone, has vanished, sir. Ah ! I am a lost man."

Cyrano's and Colignac's anger was terrible on learning of Ben-Joël's escape.

All the servants in the castle mounted horses and rushed into the country in pursuit of the fugitive.

The latter had anticipated the chase.

Instead of running away, as a novice would not have failed to do, he went a distance of a league at the most and crouched down in some rushes not far from the road.

An hour later, he saw pass, a cavalcade, at the head of which rode Savinien, Colignac and Sulpice, accompanied by Marotte.

The horses were going at a rapid pace.

"Very good," said the Bohemian to himself, "there they go a hunting. They may go to the end of the world like that, if such be their pleasure."

Although hungry and wet, Ben-Joël waited a long time before deciding to leave his hiding-place.

Finally, toward noon, the company of horsemen reappeared, on the way to Château de Colignac.

The nobleman was alone with his servants.

"Ah," concluded the Bohemian, "they have grown tired; these are returning home, and the others have gone on to Paris. I can set out now."

He shook out his wet garments and began to walk rapidly in the tracks of Savinien and his suite.

He did not intend to make the journey on foot. He hoped, at the first halt, to procure a horse and some money at any cost.

At night, on leaving a hamlet in which he had been given a piece of rye bread and a glass of wine, without which he would have been unable to continue on his way, he met a horse dealer leading three teams of superb horses.

"Now is my chance," said Ben-Joël, who for a moment had cherished the plan of a bold stroke, but who, nevertheless, preferred to have offered him that which he was disposed to take.

"Ha! my friend!" he called to the horse dealer.

"What do you want?" asked the latter, stopping.

"Might one, without being impertinent, ask where you are going?"

"It is no secret, my good man. I am going direct to Paris."

"To Paris! I could not have hit it better."

"Why?"

"Would you like me for a companion?"

"Ha!" cried the horse dealer, "if you wish: the road belongs to the public."

"The road belongs to the public, yes; but these horses are yours. Fine animals, my faith!"

"I think they are. They are for the King's stables, my good fellow."

"Supposing the King or the courtiers are to mount them, would it disgrace them to carry a poor devil like me?"

"Are you going to Paris?"

"Have I not told you so? Besides, I am worn out with fatigue and I have not a cent in my purse. I might be of use to you on the way, if you would.

"Indeed, I ask nothing better. My boy was taken ill on the road, and if you can take his place, I will give you several pistoles on reaching Paris."

Ben-Joël did not need to be told so twice. He strode one of the horses and the dealer saw at once by the manner in which the Bohemian managed his horse, that he had not misplaced his confidence.

It was thus that Zilla's brother was enabled to reach Paris, almost at the same time as Cyrano,—who was not more than a half-day in advance of him.



XXXVII.

HAVING seen his attempt at poisoning fail, Roland de Lembrat sought the grand provost, Jean de Lamothe, and found him very busy.

The preparation of Mancel's case was nearing completion, and the magistrate, who had studied the minutest details, wished to review himself, one by one, every bit of paper.

On seeing Roland enter, he rose and hastened to meet him.

"M. de Lamothe," said the Count to him, "pardon me for disturbing you in the midst of your grave work, but . . ."

"But," interrupted the provost, uttering his visitor's thought, "you are impatient to know what is going on and you have come to ask me how matters stand."

"Precisely. I am greatly interested in this case," continued Roland, hypocritically, "not that I am looking for vengeance or simple satisfaction from it, but because it seems curious to me to see the real motives of the strange fraud of which I have been the dupe, revealed."

"If one were to believe the accused, there has been no fraud."

"Does he still deny it?" cried Roland, with well-feigned astonishment.

"He does. I have just examined him again."

"Well?"

"He insists that the name and title he assumed be-

long to him and he adds that you know it better than any one!"

"I?"

"Yes, sir. He even claims—it is unprecedented, but he claims—that, before the judges, he will furnish material proof of the truth of his words."

"Material . . . proof?" murmured Roland, anxiously. "Of what is he speaking?"

"I do not know. He refused to explain himself."

"What do you think it is?"

"I can think of nothing. One thing only struck me. During my other examinations, Manuel was sad, indeed, crushed. He replied to my questions with evident lassitude. To-day, he was truly changed; he spoke in a firm voice, it almost seemed as if he believed in his approaching victory. It puzzles me greatly."

"Have you not, at your command, the means of penetrating the depths of his mind? The man is shrewd; he is perhaps playing a bold part."

"There is no part which could hold its own before the formidable preparations of the law."

"You think he will speak?"

"Yes, in a few days. I have, I have already told you, the means of making him. The best of those means and the last, for I only use it in cases of obstinacy similar to his, is . . ."

"Is?"

"Torture."

"Truly," said the Count, coldly, "I had forgotten it."

Roland's soul was filled with great satisfaction. Without having asked for it, he had obtained that for

which he had come. He knew that in the torture chamber, the courage of the strongest had its moments of weakness, and he relied on the cruelty of the torture to draw from Manuel the confession of his guilt and to assure his final ruin.

"*À propos*," asked the provost, suddenly, "did you not send some one to Manuel?"

"I sent a man with food for the prisoner. In spite of myself, this Manuel interests me, and I tried to make his situation more bearable," explained the Count, boldly.

"You are truly very kind; with such natures, there is no need of so much commiseration."

"Did he tell you of it?" asked Rinaldo, not without some perplexity.

"No! it was the jailer."

The Count felt reassured.

"I took pains," he continued, "to bid my messenger not to tell who had sent him. Manuel, it appears, was suspicious of him, for he refused to receive him again."

"Yes," murmured the provost, thoughtfully, "and certain words made me think that the new hope to which the prisoner seemed to cling might have some connection with that visit."

Again, Count de Lembrat was troubled. Then he reflected that his position relative to the prisoner, the superiority which an accusation justified up to that time by facts, would give him, would put him beyond all suspicion and all fear.

He took leave of the grand provost without urging him any further, and repaired to the house of Marquis de Faventines.

After Manuel's arrest, Gilberte had submitted to the restraint imposed upon her by her father.

Nothing having occurred to enlighten her on the subject of Manuel's innocence, she had not dared believe in a result favorable to her love.

For the second time, she had fallen from the pinnacle of her dreams.

Manuel was a gypsy; the young girl was prohibited from thinking of him.

But could she govern her heart, which drew her irresistibly toward the young man, could she turn her mind, always filled with thoughts of him, in another direction?

No! Gilberte loved and she had no longer the strength to resist that love, of which, notwithstanding all, she could not believe Manuel unworthy.

During the few days in which a fleeting piece of good fortune had permitted the young man to live near Gilberte, to speak to him as to her equal, she had been able to appreciate the delicacy of his feeling and the value of his mind.

In losing his position in the world, he had not lost his prestige in Mlle. de Faven. nes' eyes.

When free, he had captivated her; when a prisoner, he had blinded her, having about his head the aureole of unmerited misfortune.

She had, for lack of other proofs, the intuition of Manuel's innocence. She would gladly allow the obscurity of his birth, but not the disloyalty of his character. And willingly she believed that he was the victim rather than the culprit.

That truth, she felt within her, together with the regret of not being able to prove it by facts.

It will not surprise our readers, that Gilberte, while confessing her impotence to save Mamelet, had taken a firm resolution on the subject of her marriage with Roland.

She did not desire to wed the Comte.

With the power of inertness possessed to a supreme degree by certain temperaments, she suffered to go on around her all the plans and all the hopes relative to her union, indifferent herself to that which she knew would never be consummated.

Having resolved to escape Roland's grasp, even should she have to take extreme measures, she allowed him to come to Hôtel de Faventines, listened patiently to his protestations of love, and left him, without breach of etiquette, to lock herself in her room and abandon herself to sweet though sad memories.

While accepting the duties of a situation which her father's inflexible will had brought about, Gilberte, honest above all things, did not wish to have him believe in the complete surrender of her will.

Each time the Marquis spoke to her of her approaching union, she replied simply :

"I shall never become M. Roland de Lerabrat's wife."

Her father was frequently irritated by the reply. Then, gradually, he became used to it, and looked upon it as the result of rebellion, which he would be easily able to overcome at the last moment.

Roland arrived at Hôtel de Faventines in such a mood that Gilberte could at once see the imminence of a struggle.

On arriving at his *fiancée's*, Roland found Gilberte's father and mother alone.

Entangled in a series of complications he had given rise to himself, but the results of which he was not yet sure of turning to his account, the Count wished at least to assure himself of the possession of Gilberte.

He loved the maiden with a passion which obstacles redoubled.

He desired her in spite of herself and in spite of all things, and his passionate blood did not permit him to reflect on the state of Gilberte's feelings.

When he was ushered into the presence of the Marquis and of Mlle. de Faventines, having inquired for their daughter's health, for she was not there, he frankly broached the subject.

"Marquis," said he, "while regretting that I am not able to greet Mlle. Gilberte, I am pleased to find an opportunity of putting before you my hopes and my desires. I have had your promise for a long time. When will you permit me to claim the fulfilment of it?"

"My dear Count," replied the old Marquis, "you know that I am at your service. If the date of your marriage has not yet been set, it is because recent events have troubled Gilberte as well as ourselves, and have turned us away from what, believe me, is our dearest thought."

"I believe that the memory of the unfortunate event to which you allude, is beginning to be effaced from your mind, M. de Faventines, and it should no longer prove a hindrance to my happiness."

"I have never considered that memory an obstacle. The shock, the trouble caused us by the arrest of your brother, pardon me, of this Manuel, I should say, are entirely dissipated to-day. Let us, therefore, talk, if

you wish, of the union which you honor us by so ardently desiring.

"But, tell me," the Marquis interrupted himself, "do you know what has become of Cyrano?"

"I do not."

"You are, however, on excellent terms with him?"

"Not exactly. Nevertheless, I am quite anxious as to his movements," said Roland, with a smile of double meaning. "I do not know where he is, but I know that he has left Paris."

"For long?"

"Bergerac is adventurous and would probably be unable to foresee himself the end or the result of his trip," continued Roland, in the same tone.

"He is greatly interested in your . . . in Manuel," corrected the Marquis for the second time, decidedly, little prone to forget that he had known Viscount Ludovic de Lembrat.

"Yes, very greatly."

"Why has he forsaken him thus?"

"Cyrano has some *amour-propre*. He does not want to avow that he has upheld an impostor, and perhaps he has deemed it wise to remain in retirement until the law shall have relieved him of his *protégé*."

"It must be so, I can see no better explanation to give for his departure."

"Let us forget Bergerac, M. de Faventines, and as you said just now, let us talk of my marriage. Our conversation will be brief on that point. There only remains for us to fix a date."

"I will consult Gilberte."

"Oh! Young girls are never in a hurry in such cases. The decision must be made for them. In two

weeks, if you wish it, sir, I will become your son-in-law."

For an instant the Marquis looked at his wife, who, absorbed in a piece of tapestry, had taken no part in the discussion, and seeing no sign of opposition on Madame de Faventines' face, he replied:

"Very well, my dear Count, in two weeks."

As he spoke, he extended his hand to Roland, who pressed it with energy.

He was undoubtedly about to add some words of gratitude, when Gilberte appeared.

Her recent trouble had greatly changed her. Her face, pale from wakefulness, was longer, and her eyes sparkled with extraordinary and disquieting brilliance.

In their glance which she sought vainly to hide beneath the shadow of her long lashes, could be read excitement with difficulty suppressed, a sort of indefinite menace, which, however, up to that time neither her father nor her mother, accustomed to seeing her daily, had noticed.

Roland alone remarked the change in Gilberte's face.

She seemed to him more beautiful still, and more than ever did he long for the moment when he would become the master of that treasure.

Gilberte advanced with an automatic step to the centre of the *salon*, and returned the Count's salutation, without for a moment losing the rigidity of marble.

"Have you been ill, Mademoiselle?" Roland de Lembrat ventured to inquire.

His betrothed looked at him coldly.

"No, sir," she murmured. "Why that question?"



"I thought they told me," . . . stammered Roland, disconcerted by her glance in which there was more than indifference, possibly hatred.

"Those around me are easily rendered anxious," continued Gilberte, in the same clear and icy tone. "Whatsoever they may have told you, rest assured, sir, I have not been, I am not ill."

She passed on and seated herself near Mme. de Faventines.

Roland remained until curfew, but Gilberte did not add one word to those she had just spoken. The Marchioness, likewise silent, looked furtively at her. Gilberte seemed calm; she was working busily on a piece of her mother's tapestry, and listened, without appearing interested, to the conversation between Roland and the Marquis.

That conversation, having exhausted ordinary topics, turned upon the subject which the two men would have gladly avoided, but which, almost fatally, attracted them.

They talked of Manuel.

Gilberte thus learned that M. de Lamothe had that very day examined him she loved, and that he remained firm in his intentions.

The prisoner's attitude, which greatly vexed the Marquis, seemed to Gilberte to conform wholly with the idea she had always entertained of Manuel's character.

She felt proud of his love, and her thoughts reverted to the cell in which she had buried all her hopes and all her girlish dreams.

When the Count had left, M. de Faventines drew near Gilberte and said to her:

"My child, we talked of you a great deal this evening with Count de Lembrat. He besought me to make a formal decision in his favor, and I yielded to his entreaties."

"Go on, father," replied Gilberte, seeing that the Marquis expected an objection, or at least a question.

"It has been settled," continued the Marquis, "that your marriage take place in two weeks."

"That is a well-determined plan; is it your absolute wish?"

"Have I not told you so already?"

"And, father, have I not already told you that I should never become M. de Lembrat's wife?"

"It is a whim in which I do not wish to believe. This marriage is necessary, Gilberte. It is an honor for us; let me add that it will be fortunate for you, and do not cause me the sorrow of a resistance at which I could not stop."

"Is that final?"

"It is final," replied the Marquis, knitting his brows.

"May God preserve you, father," concluded the maiden, bowing before the old man.

Then, having embraced her mother, she withdrew to her room, dismissed Pâquette, who was waiting to undress her, and opened her window in order to inhale the night air.

Before her were outlined the dark shadows of the buildings on the quay; a few yards off, almost beneath the window on which she was leaning, rolled the deep waters of the Seine, with their melancholy murmur.

"No, not that; it is horrible!" murmured the girl, leaving the window.

On reaching the middle of the room, she paused, grew suddenly pensive, and the name of Zilla crossed her lips almost mechanically.

Her feverish eyes sparkled with a new light. Gilberte had no doubt found what she was seeking.

## XXXVIII.

AFTER the first attacks of the illness which had laid her low, Zilla had rallied contrary to expectation, owing rather to the energy of her nature than to the resources of science,—at that epoch very limited.

She could not yet leave her room, she had scarcely strength enough to leave her bed, but reason had returned.

The tempest which had raged in her brain gradually subsided, as does the ocean, to all appearances exhausted from its own violence; she felt revived within her the power of action so fatally crushed at the moment when she had hoped to make use of it in the interest of Manuel.

Her memory was again clear, and she thought with profound anguish that many hours had passed since the moment when she had essayed to reach the captive in order to snatch him from death.

She asked for her brother. Manuel had not returned. Then, having no means of direct enlightenment, she feared to ask any questions. Voluntarily, she remained ignorant of the young man's fate.

“Manuel is dead.”

Such was the phrase which rang incessantly in her ears and which she feared to hear pronounced any morning by the old portress, the only person who came near her.

With what impatience did she await the time of convalescence!

She once thought of sending her nurse to the *châtellet* and of charging her with a message for Johann Müller. But the shrew's ability was doubtful, and Zilla gave up her plan.

An incident which she had not foreseen soon brought her information as to Manuel's fate.

On the day after that on which Gilberte, apparently resigned, had bowed to her father's will, Zilla, alone and sad in her lodging, was thinking of her brother and of Manuel, of her brother for whom she had no regard, but whose support would have been a great help to her in that circumstance, of Manuel, whom in her solitary waiting, she still liked to think living and whom, in the near future, she saw at liberty.

Zilla, like all women in love, was superstitious. Moreover, she had been reared in the custom of certain practices in which the gypsies did not always believe, but which had always served them to exercise an ascendant over impressionable or naïve minds. She had read a large number of books on sorcery, and occasionally chance had given a semblance of truth to the horoscopes cast by the gypsy, by reason of the science acquired in those books.

On that especial evening, her mind was singularly disposed to things marvelous. While dreaming of Manuel's and of her own destiny, she said to herself:

"Who will raise the veil of the future? If that science of divination taught me was not a tissue of lies, I could read the mystery."

She rose with difficulty, went into a corner and placed on her table a large crystal goblet, which she filled with water.

Then she moved her lamp away, placed in front of

the cup a silver mirror, before which she lighted a wick dipped in sulphur.

The bluish light of the sulphur, reflected by the mirror, at once colored the water contained in the crystal.

Zilla watched the play of the light closely.

Suddenly it went out.

The fortune-teller started.

"Ah!" she murmured, "blood, blood and darkness! The life of a human being goes out like the flame reflected by this mirror, after having shone like it. Is it Manuel who is to die? Is it I?"

A low rap was heard at the door, which opened at once, and Zilla in the semi-obscure of the apartment saw a masked woman. Behind her was a man, no doubt a confidential servant, who maintained a respectful attitude.

Before addressing a word to Zilla, the stranger turned toward the man and said to him:

"Watch the door, my good Guillaume, and let no one enter as long as I am here."

Guillaume disappeared and the two women were left alone.

"Your name is Zilla, I believe?" the visitor inquired of the gypsy.

"Yes, Mad me. What do you wish?"

"I will tell you. Swear to me first to respect the secret of my visit."

"Have I any need to make that vow? I do not know you."

"It matters not! That which is about to take place here must remain between us."

"Very well. I swear that I will not betray you."

The masked woman then noticed that Zilla was exceedingly pale and found it difficult to stand.

"You are ill!" said she. "Sit down."

Zilla sank upon her bed, where she remained seated, while her visitor stood beside her.

"Zilla," the lady commenced, "you make a profession of reading the fate of men in the lines of their hands, and occasionally you sing on the cross-ways with your companions?"

"Those who have spoken to you of me, know me well, Madame."

The stranger seemed to hesitate, then she resumed:

"But that is not all, is it? You have other talents?"

"Not any. Why that question?"

"You do not understand me. Must I explain myself better? Has not your race the privilege of mysterious practices, of terrible formulas, unknown to the multitude? Have you not yourself, inherited from your fathers one of those vital secrets?"

Zilla tried to read the stranger's eyes, for the mask would not permit her to study her face.

"A love-philter!" said she, "perhaps that is what you want?"

"No!" said the stranger, shaking her head with a sort of nervous impatience.

"Then, it is? . . ."

It was Zilla's turn to hesitate.

"Do you fear to guess or to be told?" murmured the masked woman.

She leaned toward the fortune-teller and spoke to her in a low voice.

"Poison!" cried Zilla, "you ask for poison?"

"Be silent, since that word terrifies you."

"No, not the word, the fact! I cannot lend my hand to a crime."

"Have I told you that there is any question of a crime?" asked the visitor, in a haughty tone.

"Can I not imagine it, Madame?"

"Rest assured," said she, bitterly, who was cross-examined thus, "if any one is to die from the poison, it is I alone."

"You wish to die, you, young, rich, beloved, no doubt!"

"What matters it to you? I do not ask your pity. A day will come,—soon, perhaps,—when I shall have no other refuge from my fate than death. That death I wish to meet to suit myself. The black waters of the Seine which flows beneath my windows inspire me with horror; cold steel penetrating to my heart terrifies me; I want a poison that will put me to sleep or that will kill me!"

Zilla rose, saying:

"There is madness in your words, Madame. Give me your hand."

The stranger obeyed.

"Ah!" exclaimed Zilla, having examined the dainty white hand held out toward hers without hesitation "those lines . . . are familiar to me. . . . Love . . . deception! . . . a struggle! triumph or death!"

"I remember," she concluded, recoiling with an exclamation: "you are Gilberte de Faventines!"

"Who has told you so?" murmured the stranger, in a disconcerted voice.

"Remove your mask," continued Zilla. "It is us



less now. I have read those words of your destiny in your hand before now . . . at your father's house . . . I have recognized you by them."

Zilla's instinct had not deceived her. It was indeed to Gilberte de Faventines she was speaking.

The girl took off her mask, and her face was lighted up by energetic resolution.

"Since you know me," said she, "give me what I ask of you, for perhaps you know also why I wish to die."

The gypsy's eye flashed, and in a slow voice she asked:

"Then you love him, too?"

"I! Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Manuel! Of Manuel whom I loved, whom you have taken from me, and whose ruin you have thus caused."

"Unhappy woman!"

The two young girls gazed at each other an instant. There was defiance in their attitude; indignation, aroused by the gypsy's words, inspired Gilberte, while Zilla felt all the wounds in her heart reopen, and her passionate jealousy revive.

Morally stronger than Gilberte, Zilla speedily conquered her anger, and seeing the situation in a new light, she asked:

"Is Manuel still living?"

"He is," replied Gilberte. "Do you not know it?"

An indefinable beam of joy lighted up Zilla's countenance.

At first, on finding herself in the presence of her beautiful rival, she had thought only of her unrecognized love, forgetting to ask herself if, as she had cause to fear, her passion was not now aimless.

Her presence of mind had been regained soon enough so that before all she might gain information of Manuel!

Reassured by Mademoiselle de Faventines' reply, the soothsayer again yielded to the promptings of her passionate nature.

"You love him!" she repeated.

Gilberte raised her head.

"If I did not love him, would I be here?" she confessed, frankly. "Of what use is it to hide the secret from you, since I have put myself entirely in your hands! My father wishes me to marry Count de Lembrat. I hate the man and I scorn him. If they persist in their determination to make me marry him, I shall await the time with resignation, for, before touching the Count's hand, before hearing the priest's benediction, I shall be dead."

"Will you really persevere in your resolution?"

"More than ever!"

"And you still rely upon me to serve you?"

"Why not?" asked Gilberte, in a singular tone.

The meaning hidden beneath those two simple words did not escape Zilla.

Mlle. de Faventines, believing that she could not win Zilla over with money, seemed to say to her, by her manner, her glance, her accent:

"You hate me, for I have taken Manuel's love from you. If Manuel should some day be free, he will come to me, not to you. Give me the weapon I ask of you. When I am once dead, no one else will be able to contend with you for him for whom I am sacrificing myself."

Those words, which Gilberte's lips, however, had not yet uttered, rang out clearly in Zilla's soul. An

evil spirit repeated them to her incessantly, and she felt her conscience weakening in the face of those perfidious insinuations.

She saw her love triumphant over Gilberte's; she saw the road free between her and Mamelet.

For that, it would require but one drop of poison, and that poison she could pour out herself, without any other crime than that of a kindness, for which her selfishness furnished her with a ready excuse.

As she remained absorbed in meditation, struggling against the temptation by which she felt her every fibre invaded, Gilberte laid her hand on hers.

The mute inquiry aroused the gypsy from her reverie.

Her last scruple vanished, the demon of jealousy wholly possessed her.

Coldly, she turned toward Gilberte and replied :

"You are right, Mademoiselle."

Then, opening a box near her, she took from it a necklace of amber beads, which she offered to her, saying :

"Take this necklace, it is yours."

"How?" asked Gilberte, with indecision.

"Those are amber beads," explained the gypsy; "this one which hangs beside the silver amulet, is similar to the others in appearance, and yet. . . ."

"Give it to me, I understand," cried Gilberte, feverishly; "the bead is poisoned!"

"It will dissolve in water without leaving any traces and will cause death in a few instants without suffering and without agony."

"Thanks, Zilla, you have understood me. If I should die, do not reproach yourself. Blame fate

alone. And if Mnnuel returns your affection, be happy ; speak to him sometimes of me. No one is jealous of the dead."

Those words, uttered in a slightly unsteady voice, caused the veil stretched over Zilla's eyes to fall.

She realized the horror of the action she was about to commit ; she was ashamed of herself and, rushing toward the girl, she cried :

" Ah ! see, I am mad ! Give me back the necklace, give it me back ! "

" No, Zilla ! To return it to you, would not be to give up my wish, it would condemn me to a death more painful and slower. *Au revoir*, Zilla ; I trust in God."

" You must not go."

And the gypsy, exhausted by the scene which caused her fever, scarcely abated, to rise again, nevertheless found strength enough to prevent the maiden from going out.

She cast herself at Gilberte's knees and, clinging to them with her arms, she murmured :

" Ah ! Mademoiselle, you are better than I and more worthy of being loved. On losing Manuel, you thought of death ! I thought only of vengeance. Pardon me and live."

" Rise, Zilla, and give me your hand. A common sorrow has made us sisters, but do not hope to move me. You have given me a precious treasure which will bring me rest, and I shall keep it ! "

" When is your marriage to take place ? " asked Zilla, abruptly.

" In two weeks."

" Is M. de Cyrano in Paris ? "

"I do not know. Why all these questions?"

"Because I have enough sins to expiate, because I am weary of the shameful rôle I have hitherto played, because I wish to save you and to give you back Manuel!"

"You!"

"Am I not the cause of his ruin?"

"Well?"

"You have heard speak of the book containing the record of Manuel's life?"

"Well?"

"The book, stolen from Count Roland, as well as from M. de Cyrano, is in my possession; I have the care of it."

"Your brother?"

"My brother is not to be feared; he is far from here; besides, what could he do in the face of that proof and of my confession? The confession was kept in the depths of my conscience by a cowardly hope. Now, I shall speak."

"You will not be believed. M. de Lamothe is too well armed against Manuel."

"I will show the book."

"It will not be accepted as true. We women, Zilla, are not strong minded enough to combat the arguments of a magistrate as firm in his conviction as the grand provost seems to be. It requires a man's hand to guide the enterprise you meditate through so many obstacles."

"A man? One alone could serve us, and you say he is not in Paris."

"M. de Bergerac?"

"The same."

"Perhaps he has returned."

And hastening to the door, Gilberte called the servant who was awaiting her.

"Guillaume," she commanded, "go to M. de Bergerac's lodgings and find out if he has returned. Be discreet and prompt, above all things. Go; you will find me here."

The distance which separated the House of Cyclops from the inn at which Cyrano lived, was not great. While Guillaume hastened to Master Genin's with a step as nimble as that of a young man, the two women talked of their plans.

Zilla did not assist in awakening Gilberte's hopes, without secret and poignant sorrow.

She had, however, courageously taken her resolution and put back into the depths of her soul all the bitter thoughts with which her sacrifice could inspire her.

Gilberte suspected the struggle and dared not talk too much of the past.

She would have liked to know, though, how the plan which resulted in Manuel's arrest had originated and what part Count Roland had taken in it.

Guillaume's return put an end to her indecision.

"M. de Bergerac is not in Paris," said Mlle. de Faventines' messenger, "nor do they know when he will return."

"Well," said Gilberte, sadly, "God is not for us."

"I will go to M. de Cyrano's house to-morrow," concluded Zilla. "Perhaps I shall be more fortunate."

"Will you have the strength? You are still ill."

"I will conquer my disease; it has kept me a prisoner in this room for too many days now."

"Shall I receive news of you?"

"Through M. de Cyrano, if I see him. As for you, mademoiselle," she added, in a lower voice, "consent now to that which you just refused me. Give me back the necklace."

"No, Zilla. Our hope may be but a chimera, and I wish to be armed."

"I shall succeed, I tell you. I have a presentiment of it."

"In that case, you have nothing to fear for me."

"You will never have need to make use of the formidable gift I have made you," persisted Zilla.

"Who knows?" murmured Gilberte, pensively.

Having, with a determined gesture, indicated that she would not yield, the maiden bade the gypsy a hurried farewell and left the room, accompanied by Guillaume.

The latter, an old servant of the de Faventines family, accustomed to blindly respect his mistress' orders, reconducted her to her home.

Arrived there, and bidding her protector be discreet, although she felt sure of his prudence, Gilberte reached her room without attracting attention, and for the first time in many nights, she slept peacefully.

## XXXIX.

ZILLA did not sleep. As after all great physical or mental shocks, her mind, deeply agitated, had condemned her to painful wakefulness, interrupted by a few moment of semi-drowsiness more cruel even than insomnia.

When day broke, the time seemed to her to drag less slowly, and she tried to walk around her room.

Her still aching limbs moved as if worked by a nervous spring.

Nevertheless, she dressed herself, took the book from the hiding-place in which Ben-Joël had put it, and slowly descended the stairs leading to the lower floor.

In the parlor, she met the portress, who uttered an exclamation of astonishment on seeing her.

"Are you going out, Zilla?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the gypsy, curtly.

"But, my girl, you are as pale as a corpse. You will faint by the wayside."

"No!" replied Zilla, still laconically.

And she went on, while the old woman shrugged her shoulders with an air of pity, murmuring:

"After all, it is her business."

The air revived the convalescent. She turned her steps toward Cyrano's house, and, on reaching it, she saw the innkeeper engaged in a very animated conversation with the poet's servant.

The tavern wore its usual aspect. At that early



hour, no customer had yet crossed the threshold, for the tables were empty and the pewter tankards were symmetrically arranged in rows on the dressers. There is, almost always in any house to which a new guest is coming, or an acquaintance returns, a certain air of disorder, which is betrayed in the most trifling things.

At first sight, Cyrano's lodgings did not show any of those signs.

However, notwithstanding the excellent order in the coffee-room, where nothing seemed to have been disturbed since the preceding night, the travelers, that is to say, Savinien, Castillan and Marotte, had arrived.

All three, worn out by their long journey, were still sleeping soundly.

It was Marotte's arrival which formed the subject of the innkeeper's and Cyrano's servant's conversation. The latter had been obliged to give her room to the dancer and was not a little vexed at the pretty demon's invasion of her premises.

Zilla questioned the innkeeper and did not seek to hide her satisfaction when she heard of Cyrano's return.

"Can I speak to M. de Bergerac at once?" she inquired of Master Gonin.

"I will see," replied the latter. "It is now nine o'clock, and, even when he has been up half of the night, M. de Cyrano is not in the habit of waking earlier."

He invited Zilla to enter and hastily mounted the staircase leading to the first floor.

The servant, on the arrival of the gypsy, walked away in the direction of porte de Nesle.

Zilla was therefore left alone for a moment in the coffee-room; at the end of that time, Master Gonin's voice called to her from the head of the staircase:

"Come up!"

She obeyed with alacrity, and the innkeeper, allowing her to pass before him, pointed out the poet's door to her, adding:

"Go in; you are awaited."

Zilla approached the poet, who was seated at the other end of the room, busily writing.

"Ah! ah!" cried Cyrano, "is it you, my dear? You are giving me an agreeable surprise by this visit, for I thought you were angry with me for good."

Without seeming to have noticed the ironical accent with which those words were uttered, Zilla replied:

"A grave reason has brought me here, M. Cyrano. Will you listen to me?"

"I am all ears. Have you, perchance, come to ask me for news of your excellent brother?"

"My brother?"

"It was not owing to my lack of good will that I did not bring him to Paris with me. He escaped from my care; but you may rest assured that some day or other I shall be able to reward him according to his merits."

"I did not come about my brother," interpolated Zilla, who was evidently growing impatient at the poet's wit; "I came about Manuel."

"Ah! about Manuel! Poor boy, I would be delighted to embrace him!"

Then the gypsy explained herself. She told of her love, of her jealousy, of her struggles, and finally she implored Cyrano's pardon.

Savinien forgave readily.

"Ah!" said he to Zilla, "I ask nothing better than to believe you. The confession you have just made to me redeems your faults, and if you are sincere . . ."

"Do you desire a proof of it?" interrupted the gypsy.

"A proof!" repeated Cyrano, puzzled.

Zilla took from under her wraps the book with which she had armed herself, and without a word placed it before the poet.

It was a large volume of parchment; roughly but firmly bound, the first pages of which bore a very ancient date.

It was written entirely in the Romany tongue. Cyrano opened it with the tip of his finger and curiously examined the odd characters with which almost all the leaves were covered.

"What is this scrawl?" he asked.

"You should know; you should guess, at least."

"Ben-Joël's book?"

"Yes!"

"At last!" cried Cyrano, "here is then, the famous testimony, which that arch-knave has hidden so adroitly from us. Truly, Zilla, your action has reconciled me with you. Where is the passage which refers to Manuel and young Simon's death?"

Zilla turned the pages of the book for an instant and translated for Cyrano the two inscriptions he desired to know.

"That is perfect," said he; "if I did not now have in my possession still surer weapons, this book would be an undeniable treasure. Are you certain of the meaning you give to those lines?"

"Send for some one of my race; show him the pages. If he or she whom you consult is familiar with the language of his or her fathers, the translation will be the same."

"I believe you. Go in peace, my child; Manuel will be free to-morrow morning."

"Why not to-day?"

"Because to-day I must see Count de Lembrat, and spare him, not for himself, but for the sake of the name he has the honor of bearing, the scandal of a public exposure. If he persists in his resistance, well, so much the worse for him. I shall have done my duty by his father's memory."

"Adieu, M. de Cyrano, I have faith in you."

The poet rose and escorted the gypsy as far as the door.

Then he summoned Marotte.

The dancer, still sleepy, arrived ten minutes later. Cyrano took Ben-Joël's book, and, putting his finger on the passage pointed out by Zilla, he said:

"Tell me the meaning of this."

Marotte read and translated the lines pointed out to her without hesitation.

Her version agreed almost word for word with that of Zilla. Cyrano closed the book and added with a smile:

"That is good. Thanks, my girl."

Shortly afterward, Master Gonin saw the poet go downstairs. Castillan was in the dining-room, eating his breakfast.

"I am going to the Count's house," his master said to him. "Do not go out before my return, and see that your *protégée* wants for nothing."

"You may rest assured of that," the secretary hastened to reply, with a fervor which brought a roguish smile to Cyrano's lips.

When the poet reached Hôtel de Lembrat, where, owing to the lateness of the hour, he hoped to meet Roland, he learned, to his astonishment, that the latter had already gone out.

"Where shall I find him?" asked Cyrano.

"Probably at the house of Marquis de Faventines," was the reply.

Savinien turned in the direction indicated; he did not want to lose any time.

Roland was indeed with the Marquis; Gilberte and her mother were likewise in the drawing-room.

When Cyrano was announced, the Count turned exceedingly pale, while Gilberte could scarcely restrain an exclamation of surprise and of joy.

The visitor advanced, a smile upon his lips, and having greeted the two ladies and shaken the Marquis' hand, he turned, still more smiling than ever, to Roland de Lembrat.

"Well," said he, "you did not expect me, my excellent friend?"

"I am happy to see you in good health," stammered Roland, scarcely conscious of what he was saying.

"Does my health interest you so greatly? You are truly too kind. But, no doubt, you are not a little anxious to hear the details of my trip, and, if you wish it, I will narrate them to you."

"Here?" ventured Roland, anxiously.

"No; it would bore these ladies."

"I cannot," again ventured the Count, "grant you the interview you propose just at present."

"Yes," interrupted the Marquis, who foresaw an approaching conflict and who wished to prevent it as far as possible, "M. de Lembrat has arranged to spend the day with us. Join our party, my dear Savinien."

"If he has promised, it would be very rude in me to wish to make him break his engagement. So I will stay, Marquis, since you have asked me."

As he uttered those words, he cast a significant glance at Roland.

Evidently Cyrano desired to keep his enemy in sight.

From that moment, not a word in the sense feared by the Count, was uttered.

Savinien was, as always on similar occasions, gay and witty.

At dinner, at which several friends of the family were present, Cyrano sat next Gilberte.

"When is the marriage to be?" he said to her, in a low voice, while the guests were conversing animatedly.

"In two weeks!" replied Gilberte, with the same precaution.

"Have you consented?"

"No! They are forcing me."

"Do not be alarmed. You shall wed Manuel; I say so."

A searching glance was Gilberte's sole reply.

The Count, absorbed in his thoughts, had not noticed what was going on.

"Of what is that fool of a Rinaldo thinking?" said he to himself. "What are Cyrano's plans? He is sparing me, that is evident; but will his reserve last long enough to permit me to escape him or to overcome him again?"

The termination of the meal again brought Cyrano face to face with Roland.

"You see, Count," sneered the poet, "I do not wish to tear you away from the pleasure of this reunion. Nevertheless we must have a talk. At what hour will it be convenient for you to meet me?"

Roland believed it prudent to gain time.

"To-night, at my house, if you like," he replied.

"Very well, to-night, although I am in a hurry."

"I will expect you at eight o'clock," said Roland, with a strange air.

What sinister project was being planned in the Count's brain?

Cyrano guessed it, possibly, for he replied:

"I desire to spare you the trouble of some new plot. I will therefore await you in my humble lodgings."

"As you like," said the Count, drily.

Those words, which presaged a battle, had been spoken in the Marquis' presence.

"Be prompt, I advise you," concluded Cyrano.

"To-morrow morning, I shall have nothing more to say to you."

## XL.

EIGHT o'clock was striking, when Roland with a punctuality indicative either of impatience or of fear, knocked at Cyrano's door.

The poet, who was talking with Sulpice, dismissed him at once and offered a seat to his visitor.

"Let us be brief," said he. "I no longer appeal to your honesty; I desire simply to enlighten you as to your position and to save the name you bear from infamy. That is still possible. If you wish, it shall be done."

"This beginning is very solemn," Roland tried to sneer; "however, it is not sufficiently clear to pass without an explanation."

"That is right; the explanation you desire, is here. Your brother ought to be free now. . . ."

"Manuel, you should say," corrected Roland.

"Do not interrupt me. I said your brother, and I repeat it. Your brother ought to be free. If he is still at the *châtelet*, it is because I wished to give you the moment of grace granted to the condemned, in order that they may confess their errors and . . . make reparation if need be."

"What do you wish of me, sir? or rather, what can you do against me?"

"I require one word to the grand provost, one word which shall be an avowal of your error,—you see, I do not say, your crime, I am sparing you all I can—and a clear and frank declaration of Manuel's rights, in



short, immediate liberty for him, safety for you. As for what I can do, you shall find that out shortly. First, reply."

"I have already replied on another occasion. I do not recognize Manuel as my brother; I will not sign the confession you ask of me."

"I foresaw this resistance. Well, Roland, listen to me: Manuel *is* your brother, and you know it full well, for you have read the proof of his birth in Ben-Joël's book."

The Count, with a shrug of his shoulders, said:

"The book does not exist."

"Pardon me, it is here."

At the same time, Savinien showed his adversary the record given him by Zilla.

After which he coolly put it away out of Roland's reach.

The latter, pale with rage, tried vainly to utter another protestation.

His eyes were fixed on Cyrano with a certain stupefaction.

The poet continued, apparently ignorant of the young man's agitation:

"I have still your father's confession to offer you. It is not the fault of your agents, that it is in my hands, for they have done all in their power to deprive me of the pleasure of bringing it to you. Fortunately, they did not succeed, and your faithful Rinaldo has paid dearly for all his exploits."

"Do you think Rinaldo is your enemy?"

"Let us use the past tense. I think that he was."

"And now?"

"My God, I no longer bear him any ill-will," said the poet, carelessly; "he is dead!"

"Dead!" cried Roland.

"Having left, written on my face, this testimony of his devotion to your cause."

And Cyrano, touching his cheek with his finger, called the Count's attention to the scratch made by Rinaldo's bullet.

"Dead!" repeated Lembrat, overwhelmed.

"Once before, I told you the facts relative to your birth; do you wish me to read you the story of it? It is there in its entirety in the old Count's writing. You must make up your mind to it; you are a Le Cornier and not a Lembrat. To-morrow the city and the court will learn of it, if you persist this evening in refusing to give me the reparation I ask of you."

"Speak lower," murmured Roland, in a voice almost of entreaty. "I am at your mercy."

"Then, you yield? It is fortunate."

"Let us finish! What price do you put on your silence?"

"I have put a blank sheet of vellum and a new pen on the table. I will dictate; do you write."

The Count sank into the seat prepared for him at the table, took the pen and waited:

"I acknowledge," dictated Cyrano, "I acknowledge having had in my hands all the proofs, the identity of my brother, at present imprisoned in the *châtelet* under the name of Manuel, and I declare all the testimony produced against him, to be lies, extorted by violence or by bribery."

"To write this, would be to proclaim my disgrace!" exclaimed Roland.

"Finish and sign it. This declaration will not go outside of the family. However, I shall have to show it to the grand provost; but he is your friend; besides, being ashamed of having been grossly deceived, he will have an interest in keeping all this secret and in opening the door of the *châtelet* to his prisoner."

"Take it, then. But in exchange, give me my father's paper and Ben-Joël's book."

"No, M. de Lembrat, that would be foolish! You have taught me suspicion. You might have Manuel assassinated on the very day on which he resumed his title and his fortune. I have need of a bit with which to curb you."

"Content yourself, sir, with humiliating me; do not insult me. If you retain all these securities, if you can publish the secret of my birth when it shall seem advisable to you, the declaration I have just written and signed becomes void. Give it back to me."

"Ah! I might die. The declaration is the safeguard of your brother's peace of mind. I will give it to him. Too many precautions cannot be taken in the present matter."

"However! . . ."

"Well, would you prefer for me to give Manuel your father's will? Has your pride decided to make the sacrifice?"

"Enough of this. You have an answer to all. I submit. Do your work, sir. Free Manuel."

"It is quite late. It is too late to go to the *châtelet*. But to-morrow before the cock crows, rest assured, your brother shall be free. Ah! I can see the grand provost's face when I get him out of his bed to tell him the news. Good-night, Count; I do not wish

to detain you beyond the genteel limit. Curfew has rung."

Roland left the room and rushed into the street, mad with rage.

An escort of servants was awaiting him there. He turned toward his hôtel, planning, as he went, a thousand projects, abandoned as soon as conceived.

Evidently, he had lost the game. Nevertheless, twelve hours still separated him from the moment when Cyrano would call upon Jean de Lamothe. In twelve hours much could be accomplished with an inventive mind and prompt audacity.

"Ah! who will rid me of that man?" Roland asked himself, on reaching home.

A shadow rose before him, on the threshold of the door.

He recognized Ben-Joël.

"You!" he exclaimed, joyfully, as if he had found an answer to his question.

"I have been waiting for you three hours, my lord."

"Follow me."

The servants retired, having conducted Count de Lembrat to his apartment, and the two men were alone.

"Rinaldo is dead; Cyrano is living."

Those were the Count's first words. They contained a reproach which Ben-Joël had no difficulty in understanding.

"Ah! my lord, we fought hard, I assure you; and since you are aware of poor Rinaldo's end, you must also know of the miraculously bold deeds we performed in order to serve you."

"What need have I to know now? All is lost . . . unless. . . ."

"Unless?" asked the Bohemian.

"Unless some one rids me of that accursed Bergerac," concluded Roland.

"Some one will rid you of him, my lord."

"Yes, you will take precautions, as usual," said the Count, disdainfully; "as usual you will arrive too late."

"It seems to me that by to-morrow. . . ."

"We have nothing to do with to-morrow, we must act to-night. In order that Cyrano's death may be of any advantage to me, he must be killed before reaching the *châtelet*, where he intends going at day-break."

"Well, we might lie in ambush on the way, and provided that there are a number. . . ."

"Yes, that is it. Go, collect some of your men. I will pay them liberally. Take knives; you can do nothing with your swords. The man is formidable."

"When and where do you want us to await your orders, my lord?"

"Let your men wait in the street. You can come here at three o'clock in the morning. I will give orders that my door be opened to you."

"Shall you join us, my lord?"

"Yes, I desire to see you at work."

"Ah! zounds!" cried Ben-Joël, as he withdrew, "I have all my defeats in mind, and I promise you I shall give Captain Satan's rapier a hard task."

## XLI.

ROLAND'S explanation had been very brief. Ben-Joël did not know why all was lost, according to the Count's expression.

The latter had maintained a prudent silence on the subject of his father's will, and he had forgotten or neglected to tell the Bohemian that the book of his tribe was in Cyrano's hands.

Notwithstanding his ignorance of the causes which made the elder Lembrat desire so earnestly his principal adversary's immediate death, Ben-Joël had gladly accepted a project which would permit him to gratify a vengeance so long hoped for.

He therefore, on leaving the house in rue Saint-Paul, hastened to the House of Cyclops, where he had not been since his arrival in Paris.

Before ascending to Zilla's room,—there was a light in her window, and she was no doubt awaiting news from Cyrano,—the Bohemian held a lengthy conference with the knaves assembled in the parlor.

They were all Newgate birds, ready to risk their lives for the slightest remuneration.

They received Ben-Joël's proposition with enthusiasm.

There was one man to attack. There would be ten against him. The risk was trifling and the reward promised by Ben-Joël considerable.

The bargain made, the Bohemian bade his companions take some rest in order to fortify themselves for

the battle, promising to awaken them himself when it was time.

When Zilla heard the knock at her door, she thought it was a messenger from Savinien.

The sight of Ben-Joël caused her no pleasure. The bandit, without noticing the change that illness and the anguish of the past few days had wrought in his sister's face, entered the room and, flinging himself on a stool, said :

"Here I am! Had you begun to despair of my return?"

"A great many things have occurred to make me forget your absence," replied Zilla, gravely.

"What things?"

"Have you forgotten Manuel?"

"How should I have forgotten him? It was on account of him that I was away."

"Have you seen the Count?"

"Certainly."

"What did he say to you? He wished to have Manuel poisoned; you know that?"

"He did not boast of that. But there is no question of Manuel just now, it is of Cyrano."

"What are you going to do?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

"Another underhand plot between you and the Count! Ben-Joël, are you not tired of your degradation?"

The Bohemian laughed cynically.

"Are you a prey to remorse?" he asked. "Do you no longer love Manuel?"

"You know full well that I love him!"

"Then cease your preaching to me, and let me act.

You do not yet know of what a brother who loves his little sister, and his little interests as well, is capable."

"I know nothing, indeed."

"Then listen. I deceived Cyrano and Mannel, it is true; but I also deceived the Count in making him believe that all would be ended if his brother was once returned to his original position. When Mlle. de Faventines shall have become Countess de Lembrat, and when Manuel, having returned to us, shall have been cured of his passion for her, I will interest myself in his future and ours."

"Wretch, do you think they would free Manuel thus?"

"They will free him, when the Count needs no longer fear his rivalry. Moreover, I know things you have never known. Let me go on."

"Very well," murmured Zilla, who, in spite of herself, was attracted by Ben-Joël's words.

"Manuel will certainly remember that he loved you and that you love him. Then . . . I will marry you."

"You will marry us?"

"Without any doubt. After which, I will humbly go in search of the magistrates, as befits a repentant sinner. I will say that M. de Lembrat bribed me, paid me for perjury; that Manuel is indeed his brother. They will require a proof; I will furnish it. They will punish me for my treachery. What of that? It would be a short term in prison. When one desires the prosperity of one's family, one is not so careful of one's own. You, married to Manuel, will profit by my devotion. You will be Countess de Lembrat. I will return to you, having made every



one happy, and will die, as late as possible, in one of Mannel's castles, of Manuel's, who might very well have forgotten or scorned the Bohemian, Ben-Joël, but who could not out of decency shut the door on his brother-in-law. Such is my little plan, darling. I hope it will meet with your satisfaction."

Zilla listened, with bowed head, to Ben-Joël's explanations.

When he finished, she looked at him and shrugging her shoulders, said:

"Your plans are absurd. They might be reasonable if you had any possible means of accomplishing them."

"How? The book which I have in my possession, which I refused the Count no less energetically than Cyrano, contains a testimony that no one could deny."

The soothsayer knew that by one word she would call forth a tempest.

But she was ready to face it.

She compressed her lips firmly; she was trying to be calm; she succeeded in her efforts.

"Ben-Joël," said she, "the book of which you speak is no longer here."

"Have they taken it from you?" roared Ben-Joël.

"No! I gave it to him!"

"You!"

"I gave it to M. de Cyrano."

"Wretch!"

And, furiously, the bandit, fist upraised, rushed upon Zilla.

She did not stir, but her sparkling eyes met Ben-Joël's and seemed to defy him to put his threat into execution.

The Bohemian's hand fell ; his insolence was checked by that glance in which he recognized a soul more powerful than his, whose brilliance fascinated him.

"Why did you do it?" he muttered, between his teeth.

"Because I am weary of so much infamy, because I have sacrificed my love, because I wish to save Manuel."

"And you gave the weapon to my most mortal enemy?"

"M. de Cyrano is not your enemy. If you hate him, it is because you feel him to be better and stronger than you."

"Ah! is that so!" cried the Bohemian. "Well, I will tell you that your fine captain will be a corpse to-morrow morning, and that Manuel may rot in the *châtelet* for all I care. I will regain possession this very night of the book you have stolen from me."

"This very night!" stammered Zilla. "This is then the new crime you were just now meditating!"

"Call it a crime, if you like; I call it vengeance. Before day breaks all will be over."

"No," replied Zilla, rushing toward the door, "for before day breaks I will have revealed all."

But, more rapid than the woman, Ben-Joël barred the way and prevented her from reaching the staircase.

"Let me pass," advised Zilla, arming herself with the stiletto which was always within her reach.

Ben-Joël, who was invariably prudent, did not deem it of any use to engage in a struggle; it was indeed useless, for he was master of the situation.

As a last defiance, as a last insult, he sneered dis-

bolically in Zilla's face, opened the door, rushed out and locked the gypsy in.

Then, not satisfied with that precaution, he took out the key, which he put in his pocket, and dragged against the door, in order to barricade it strongly, two or three pieces of furniture in the adjoining room.

During that operation, which lasted almost ten minutes, Zilla did not cease bruising her arms and tearing her hands on the door, in trying to open it.

Her voice, by turns, supplicating and angry, reached the ears of Ben-Joël, who paid no heed to it.

When he had finished his barricade, he descended softly to the lower floor, awoke his men and went out with them into the darkness.

After an hour of fruitless efforts, Zilla gave up all hope of escaping from her improvised prison. Her strength was exhausted. She flung herself upon her bed and wept.

During that same evening, so pregnant with events, Manuel unexpectedly received the grand provost's visit.

"Have you decided to make a confession?" the magistrate asked him in a severe voice.

"Less than ever. I will speak before the judges—not to confess an imaginary crime, but to prove Count de Lembrat's slander."

"Beware, Manuel; you are taking a dangerous course. You will be impeached to-morrow. A frank avowal, true repentance can obtain indulgence for you. Resistance, on the other hand, will be fatal to you."

"What have I to fear?"

"Torture!" said the grand provost in a solemn and menacing tone.

“You can torture me until I die,” replied Manuel, “without moving me, you cannot force from me one word contrary to the truth.”

The grand provost threw back his head and left the cell, murmuring:

“They all have the same assurance: according to them, the prisons are occupied only by innocent men.”

XLIII.

MAROTTE and Sulpice were talking in Master Gonin's tavern, during the interview between Cyrano and Roland: for the first time since their return, the secretary and the *danseuse* were alone and could exchange their thoughts without fear of Savinien's raillery or the maid's curiosity.

Sulpice was seated with the *danseuse*, at one of the tables in the parlor, and while Master Gonin dozed in one corner of the immense room, the couple enjoyed each other's society.

"M. Castillan," said Marotte, finally, "to-morrow morning I must thank M. de Cyrano for his kindness and take leave of him."

"To-morrow morning? You cannot think of it?"

"On the contrary, I think of it very much. I cannot stay here. It was nice to return to Paris; but, now, I must rejoin my own people."

"Where are they?" asked Castillan, not without anxiety.

"In Paris, probably. When I left the troupe at Orléans, I knew that my comrades would return here for the Saint-Germain fair."

"Does that life still attract you, Marotte?"

"Is there any gayer? To roam the world without other guide than one's fancy, to feel oneself as free as air, to sleep without care of the morrow,—even if the morrow is not assured and one's purse is empty,—to live continually on hope and to count only on the unforeseen, that is all that tempts me."

“But, miserable little ingrate,” murmured Castillan, seizing Marotte’s hand, and pressing it warmly,—“I love you!”

“Well, I love you, too,” replied the dancer, with a smile; “I hope you do not doubt it.”

“Why should I not doubt it, when you speak to me of going away? Oh! Marotte, you will make me die of jealousy.”

“What would you have me do?”

“Remain.”

“No!” said the dancer, stamping her foot with impatient mutiny. “Can you marry me, I would like to know?”

Castillan considered for a moment.

He had never put the question to himself.

Marotte resumed, without awaiting a reply, as the secretary seemed to hesitate:

“I am frank, and I know what I have the right to expect. Well, one does not marry a girl like me. You would like this marriage but I should refuse to marry you. You must not hamper yourself with me. Oh! I understand myself well.”

“You do not love me!” groaned Castillan, who sought a transition.

“Again! Come, listen to this. You are no fool, and you will understand.

“There was once a little page whose name I do not remember, whose wit, however, was as keen as his heart was kind.

“One day, on going through the cornfields, he heard a crested lark, also called, I believe, a calandra singing near the path.

“The bird soared above his head, sending its most

joyous notes toward the sun, and the page longed to possess the pretty lark.

"He called it in a voice so sweet that it came and perched quite near him.

"The child approached cautiously and kneeled in the grass on the path.

"The lark, two feet away, hopped among the corn, enticingly and nimbly, not at all frightened by the child's proximity, for birds have an instinct that does not deceive them, and the bird had divined that no one intended it any harm.

"The page put out his hand softly, and the calandra suffered him to catch it.

"Its tiny heart beat violently beneath the child's fingers, but not with fear.

"It knew that it could free itself.

"He carried it away, gave it fresh seed and pure water, and spent more than an hour giving a gloss to its plumage, as soft as silk, and covering its tiny head with kisses.

"The lark, quickly tamed, fluttered gaily about and treated its friend to its most charming songs.

"This lasted I know not how many days. The bird and the child seemed inseparable.

"And as two creatures so closely united are not slow to understand each other even without being able to speak, the calandra and the page knew how to express the affection they felt.

"A morning came when the child wept. He had discovered that his companion wished to leave him.

"As it languished and would probably have died had it been refused its liberty, the page opened his window and let it fly to the fields so full of sunlight.

"He feared he would lose it forever.

"It, however, was neither ungrateful, nor forgetful. On a fresh morning in October, as the page was walking in the country, he heard the rustling of wings and joyous chirping quite near him.

"It was the lark which, high up in the air, had espied him and had come to perch on his shoulder.

"All day long, it followed its friend, giving him the caresses and the songs of former days.

"When day drew to a close, it flew away again.

"Later on, winter came; the page was alone in his room, looking out at the snow that was falling like a shower of almond blossoms. Suddenly a bird flew from the neighboring field toward his window, and with its beak tapped on the panes.

"It was the lark again.

"The page quickly opened the window and warmed the traveler beneath his kisses. After that day, he forgot his sadness.

"The lark left him, but he knew full well that it would return.

"And in his continual hope, in that happiness made of surprises, he found a charm which entire and constant possession would perhaps not have afforded him."

When Marotte had finished the little story, which she related in her melodious and caressing voice, she looked at Castellan.

He had tears in his eyes.

Marotte held out her hand to him, and the burning tears fell upon it.

"Little page," she then smiled, "why weep? The lark will return."

"Will it really return?" asked the young man.



"I swear it."

Castillan knew, by the accent with which those words were spoken, that Marotte was not deceiving him. A smile appeared in his eyes still bright with tears.

"When will you set out?" he inquired.

"At dawn."

"I will accompany you."

"I wish you to. Adieu, Castillan."

"Good-night, Marotte," sighed the young man.

The couple separated just as Master Gonin awoke to lock his door.

## XLIII.

THE men led by Ben-Joël arrived at Count de Lembrat's house.

It was almost two hours after midnight.

The Bohemian left all his men in the street and knocked at the door of the hôtel.

Ben-Joël in view of the bold stroke planned had gathered together a strange lot of bandits.

The band consisted of two gentlemen of illustrious name, ruined by gaming and by dissipation, who had fallen to the lowest round of the social ladder, a rascal who had escaped from the royal galleys, three gypsies of Ben-Joël's tribe, two knaves accustomed from childhood to live by adventures on the streets of Paris, and a shrewd old stager to whom the profession of a thief had finally seemed preferable to the profession of arms.

In all, nine rogues, fearing neither God nor the devil, and such as were required to serve Roland de Lembrat's cause blindly.

They were armed with swords and with knives; two or three had pistols.

All awaited patiently the good pleasure of him who had enrolled them.

One thing only made them somewhat anxious. They had been promised a great deal, and as yet they had received nothing.

And, in such a case, prudence bidding them do nothing without having received at least part of the

wages expected, each resolved to speak his mind on Ben-Joël's return.

The Bohemian reappeared, at about three o'clock, accompanied by a man enveloped in a black cloak.

The man was Roland, to whom the bullies paid no heed, seeing him in company with their chief.

Ben-Joël thoroughly familiar with the customs and character of his men, did not give them time to express their wishes.

He jingled in the ears of the band a purse full of gold, and, stationing himself in the midst of the adventurers, he said:

"Boys, before pursuing the enterprise for which I have taken you into my service, it is well that you should know with whom you have to deal. He whom we have to fight against is a strong adversary, to be brief, it is Captain Satan. You know him. If any one of you so wishes, he is free to withdraw."

Murmurs were heard in the group.

However, no one stirred.

The bandits had considered the matter, and probably they believed themselves sufficiently strong to accept the offered task.

"Very well," continued Ben-Joël, "no one is afraid. Come forward, then, one after the other; I will count out to you the promised sum."

And, reaching into the purse, the Bohemian took from it the nine parts that belonged to his companions.

He had taken his in advance, and, as was just, it was the lion's share.

Roland de Lembrat, standing in the shadow, assisted at the scene, a silent witness.

At a word from Ben-Joël the band began its march. The men walked slowly, the night being still dark and he whom they awaited being certain not to appear until early dawn. Not far from port de Nesle, Ben-Joël bade his companions halt. It was through that gate that Cyrano, living in the Saint-Germain quarter, would necessarily have to pass.

“Let us wait here,” Ben-Joël advised Roland; “the thoroughfare is narrow; then, we are on the shore of the Seine. We can rid ourselves of the body by throwing it into the water.”

“You are right. Place your men so that Bergerac may be hemmed in immediately.”

The spot chosen for the ambushade was the corner of a street.

In an angle of the house before which Roland and his men were standing, a lamp was burning in a niche, dimly lighting up an image of the Virgin Mary.

Opposite the house, on the shore of the Seine, a heap of rubbish seemed put there expressly to serve as shelter for the assassins.

Ben-Joël stationed three of his men on each side of the road.

Three others were sent as scouts in the direction of port de Nesle.

All those preparations were noiselessly made.

The watchword once given, Ben-Joël rejoined the Count.

“Are you quite sure that he will come by way of porte de Nesle?” he asked.

“Undoubtedly. He lives but a short distance, and, unless he crosses the Seine above the Louvre, which he has no reason to do, there is no other way than this.”

"Are you sure that your orders have been thoroughly understood?"

"Rest assured, my lord. Captain Satan will not escape us. I will strike him the first blow."

"It must be quickly done. If I do not find on Cyrano what I am looking for, we will take his lodgings by storm."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Ben-Joël, "that would perhaps be imprudent."

"I wish it," said Roland, imperiously. "If the door is well guarded, *pardieu!* we will set the house on fire."

The Bohemian did not reply.

He leaned forward suddenly and listened.

Roland heard nothing; Ben-Joël, whose ear was keener, could distinctly hear the sound, still far away, of a horse's hoofs on the pavement.

The stars were beginning to disappear, and toward the east the sky was growing brighter above the roofs and the silent city.

It was dawn.

One of the men whom Ben-Joël had sent out as a scout, came up at that moment.

"What is it?" asked Roland.

"A man on horseback is coming this way."

"Alone?"

"All alone."

"Did you not recognize him?"

"The daylight is too faint as yet."

"It is he, no doubt," said Ben-Joël. "I will go on ahead. Hold yourselves in readiness."

The Bohemian rushed toward porte de Nesle and crouched down in order to see the horseman pass.

"It is he, indeed," he murmured.

"Forward!" he said in a low voice, to the men who had rejoined him.

Then, at one bound, he rushed to the head of Cyrano's horse and seized it by the nostrils.

The animal started violently, while Savinien sought a pistol in the holster, crying:

"Make way, knave, or I will shoot you!"

"Upon Captain Satan! With me!" cried the aggressor. All the bandits rushed toward the poet.

Roland remained in the shadow, awaiting the result of the struggle.

"An ambushade," sneered Cyrano. "Ah! *pardieu!* the Count has lost no time. Stand off, scoundrels!"

He fired without other warning.

One man fell upon the ground, his head shattered.

"For you!" cried Ben-Joël, aiming a terrible blow at the horseman.

Savinien evaded it and, hemmed in on all sides he flung himself out of the saddle, in order to defend himself the better.

He had taken his sword in his hand, and that sword, which he handled with a skill and vigor proverbial, had soon made a void around him.

Two or three bullets whistled past his ears.

"He is the devil in person!" muttered Ben-Joël, who had expected to see him fall.

And flinging himself upon the poet who, having so many enemies to contend with, could not foresee all the attacks, the Bohemian drove his sword into his right shoulder.

"Touched!" he cried.

"The other hand is sound!" replied Cyrano.

With the rapidity of lightning he changed his sword into his left hand, struck Ben-Joël's face with the blade, and with another blow pierced his breast.

The Bohemian outstretched his arms and fell as if struck by lightning.

"The chief is dead," said a voice in the crowd.

"Let every one shift for himself!"

On seeing the assassins disband, Roland took a step forward, a pistol in each hand, and aimed at Cyrano.

The two shots were fired almost at the same time. Savinien, attributing the new attack to the retreating bandits, pursued them with his sword at their backs, as far as porte de Nesle.

But the assassins seemed to have wings.

In a moment Cyrano was alone.

"Vanished!" he murmured. "They will be made to smart for this!"

He retraced his steps and whistled to his horse, which, accustomed to the call, raised its head and neighed.

"He will escape me!" said Roland, who was hidden a few paces from Cyrano, to himself.

The poet, having no longer any one to fight against, began to staunch the blood that was flowing freely from his wound, the loss of which was gradually weakening him.

Roland watched him, wondering, in that supreme moment, what desperate means could yet be employed against his enemy.

The Count had not taken his sword, thinking he would have no need of it; his pistols were not loaded; he was therefore unarmed at that time when he had need of being so strong.

Whilst Cyrano slipped his handkerchief under his clothing in order to stop up his wound as well as possible, Roland prudently turned and hid behind the rubbish flung on the shore of the Seine.

There, an idea occurred to him.

He seized a heavy paving stone, a very inconvenient, possibly, an insufficient weapon, but he had no choice, and watched the wounded man's every movement.

Chance might serve him, might furnish him with the opportunity of reaching and of striking Cyrano unawares, and Roland was not the man to neglect that chance.

When Savinien felt that he was somewhat restored, he prepared to remount his horse.

The reins, which he had thrown away at the time of the combat, were dragging on the ground.

He stooped to pick them up and to disentangle them.

With one bound, Roland was upon him, his hands upraised, and let fall upon his head the paving-stone with which he had armed himself.

Cyrano, struck thus from the rear, fell in a heap uttering a groan.

"Dead! he is dead!" murmured Roland.

And he fell upon the body of the poet, whose head was already saturated with blood, and rummaged his pockets with a trembling hand.

On Cyrano's breast, he soon found what he was looking for: Ben-Joël's book, Count de Lembrat's will, and the declaration he had himself signed the night before, that is to say, all the proofs, the existence of which he so greatly feared.

Then he raised the inert form in his arms, dragged



it to the bank of the Seine and pushed it into the river.

After which, he fled in the direction of rue Saint-Paul, pressing to his breast the treasure he had just acquired at the price of a murder.

Nothing else was left on the scene of the combat but Ben-Joël's corpse and that of his companion.

Cyrano's horse, at the first groan uttered by its master, had fled, like mad, toward Master Gonin's inn.

Day was breaking. A patrol of sentries came from the direction of the Pont-Neuf; these were soon followed by a number of citizens, who crowded around the bodies.

Almost at the same instant, Castillan and Marotte passed porte de Nesle. Marotte, leaning on the young man's arm, was talking to him in a low voice, a smile on her lips.

Thus, they reached the group formed by the soldiers and the curious.

Castillan at once recognized Ben-Joël's livid features.

"What has occurred?" he asked.

"No one knows anything, except that there are two dead men here," replied a citizen.

Castillan, while the corpses were being removed, examined the ground.

"Ben-Joël killed!" he said to Marotte, "what does this mean? See the ground is trodden down as if several men had gone over it. My master should have set out this morning. Could any accident have happened to him? Let us return to Gonin's."

He had scarcely spoken those words, when the tavern-keeper in affright rushed up and said to him:

“M. Castillan, I just went into the stable, which I had left open, and I found M. de Bergerac’s horse there, sweating and bathed in blood. It certainly has returned all alone, for I went immediately and knocked at your master’s door, but no one answered.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the young man, grief-stricken, “M. de Cyrano is dead!”

XLIV.

WHILE Castillan, Marotte and Master Gonin racked their brains conjecturing as to Savinien's fate, or, rather, while they were wondering in what place and by what means they could regain his body, Count Roland, safe within his hôtel, enjoyed his triumph without remorse.

He read his father's confession twice in succession and was convinced that it was as terrible and as overwhelming to him as Cyrano had assured him.

Then he cast into his grate all those formidable documents of which his audacity had made him master, lighted the fire, and only walked away when he had seen the last fragment consumed.

"Now," he said to himself, "nothing more is to be feared. No one will come to dispute my fortune with me; no one can snatch Gilberte's hand from me."

Several hours later, Roland de Lembrat entered the de Faventines mansion, as composed as if nothing had happened during the preceding night.

"Did you sleep well?" the Marquis inquired.

"Very."

"Did your interview with Cyrano end satisfactorily to you?"

"Yes, dear Marquis."

"I feared there would be some angry altercation. Our friend, Savinien, seemed ill-natured last evening."

"That was nothing. We had an understanding in a few words. Cyrano thought he had found some

signs in his *protégé's* favor, in Perigord, whence he comes; it took me but a minute to convince him of his error."

"Will he be here to-day?"

"I do not know."

"Will you see him?"

"Very probably. Now that there is no longer any anger between us, I do not see why I should remain away from him."

"Indeed, Cyrano has a bad head and a good heart. One cannot bear him ill-will long. We will have him at our wedding, my dear Roland."

"I hope so."

Marquis de Faventines was far from supposing that the Count at that moment was boldly dissimulating. Moreover, had he been suspicious, his mind was too simple to admit as possible so much *sang-froid* in a criminal.

He drew Roland toward the garden, into which Gilberte, accompanied by the Marchioness and Paquette, had gone.

Almost at the same hour, Manuel, closely guarded, was led into the impeachment chamber, or more strictly speaking, into the torture chamber.

The place was sinister. It was a low, vaulted room, on whose walls hung a complete collection of instruments of torture.

On the floor were other apparatus equally formidable, covered in places with brownish spots caused by gushes of blood.

There were to be found there two-edged swords, formerly used for decapitation, leaden rods, murderous pincers, small furnaces and branding-irons, jugs

for the torture with water, wooden boots with their wedges, and pulleys for the strappado.

The mere sight of that horrible museum was calculated to cause the very souls of the unfortunates brought into the room, to freeze, for the atmosphere seemed impregnated with the odor of the blood shed.

At the end rose a sort of tribunal, deminated by an immense crucifix, beneath which sat a judge, and lower down a registrar, ready to write the confessions of the accused.

Before the tribunal stood the inquisitor and his assistants, three in number on that especial day.

When Manuel entered, he could not help starting. He glanced at the magistrate who was appointed to cross-examine him. His features were unfamiliar to him.

His guards pushed him toward the tribunal and forced him to sit upon a small stool.

Then, in a slow, grave voice, the judge put the customary questions to him, to which he replied in a firm tone.

But when the examination reached the point of facts, Manuel no longer exhibited the same docility.

"Sir," said he to the judge, "I have already affirmed my innocence before the grand provost. I have said that Count Roland de Lembrat should be convicted of slander; I am ready to-day to prove the truth of those words."

"You are not here to accuse, but to defend yourself."

"My defence is altogether in that accusation. Count de Lembrat wished to have me poisoned in my prison."

"This man is mad," the judge whispered in his registrar's ear.

"By acting in that manner," continued Manuel, "is it not clearly proclaimed how greatly he feared my claims? A man trusting in his cause awaits the judges' decision; he does not think the hangman's hand too slow nor does he think of having recourse to assassination."

"You say M. de Lembrat wished to poison you? Howsoever inadmissible that allegation may be, I will at an instant accept it as probable. By the means of what testimony are you able to support it?"

"The Count sent me two bottles of wine to my cell. The man commissioned to bring them to me told me to look upon them as from a person desirous of remaining unknown, while doing a kindness to a poor prisoner. That hypocritical charity deceived me for an instant. Had I not been warned in time, you would not have had the trouble of examining me to-day; I should be dead."

"Were you warned?" asked the judge with an air of incredulity. "Who could have done it since you were closely guarded?"

"I cannot reveal to you how I came into the knowledge of the project conceived nor of the name of my informant. I attest the fact; that must suffice, especially as I can furnish proof of it."

"Very well! Then explain to me what has become of those two supposedly poisoned bottles?"

"One was broken on the floor of my cell."

"The other?"

"The other I have hidden near the stone where I was chained. Send some one to my prison, and have

the bottle brought here; you will be speedily convinced."

"If you are saying all this in order to gain time," said the judge, severely, "I warn you that your tricks will only result in the redoubling of the severity on the part of the tribunal."

"Send some one to my prison," insisted Manuel.

The magistrate made a sign to one of his guards, who immediately disappeared.

The examination was suspended until his return. He returned in a few minutes, bringing carefully with him the bottle covered with dust."

"Oh! oh!" cried the judge, "it was true, then?"

And he took the bottle which he stood in front of him, having looked at it with an appearance of mistrust.

"Sir," Manuel hastened to say, "have a few drops of the contents of this bottle poured into a glass. The poison mixed with the wine is so strong, that a small quantity is sufficient to kill the strongest man."

The accused's request was complied with.

"Now," he continued, "test it."

The judge and the registrar stared at each other in a perplexed manner, which called a bitter smile to Manuel's lips, notwithstanding the gravity of the situation.

"You must be joking," said the judge, finally. "If a few drops of this beverage is indeed sufficient to cause death, how do you want me to experiment? You do not hope to see me try an experiment of that kind on one of these men?"

"God forbid. The test should be made on animals and not on men."

"There are cats at the jailer's," timidly ventured the registrar, greatly interested by Manuel's words and without considering the quasi-comical turn his proposition would give to the scene.

"A cat!" grumbled the judge. "The majesty of the Law. . . . Well . . . . I consent."

The obliging guard, who, an instant before, had fetched the bottle designated by Manuel, took it upon himself to furnish the animal.

The cat, destined to that experience *in anima vili* was a pretty tom-cat with a white and silky coat.

He made his appearance, cuddled in the guard's arms, with his eyes blissfully closed.

Evidently the poor beast was confiding.

"Come!" said the judge.

"Simply dip the feather of a pen in the beverage," explained Manuel.

With those words, the accused rose.

The judge passed him the pen dipped for an instant in the glass, and Manuel offered it, thus prepared, to the cat.

The pretty tom put out his pink tongue and licked the feather.

The wine that colored it came from Spanish soil, and its sweetness evidently tickled the animal's palate, for it returned three times to the treat offered it.

Manuel took the pen away perfectly dry. Not one tiny drop of the liquid had been lost.

"It is strange!" he murmured, seeing that the cat had resumed its sleeping posture without showing the slightest sign of uneasiness.

The judge and the registrar looked at each other again.



"Nothing!" said the judge.

"Absolutely nothing!" repeated the registrar.

The experimenter took the glass, poured into it two fingers of wine, again dipped the pen in the beverage and then passed it rapidly over his lips.

He waited to feel the burning sensation, which, once before, had helped him to recognize the presence of the poison.

The liquor was as sweet as honey. Manuel turned pale.

Then, yielding to a desperate resolution, he raised the glass to his lips and emptied it at one draught.

"The miserable fellow is poisoning himself!" exclaimed the magistrate.

Notwithstanding, Manuel stood there erect.

With a smile full of bitterness, he placed the glass on the table and said :

"No, my lord, fear nothing. Heaven is against me. That glass contained only wine."

"Then you have deceived us?" thundered the magistrate, indignantly. "You have but sported with our kindness?"

"Heaven is against me," repeated Manuel, with resigned melancholy. "The proof I believed I had, has escaped me. One only of the two bottles was poisoned, and that one I broke in a fit of anger."

"I will not be duped by this story. The ridiculous farce you have just played, the object of which I cannot divine, will but aggravate your position."

Evidently the judge was exceedingly angry.

He made a sign to his registrar, who prepared to write, and, addressing Manuel again, he said :

"The deeds with which you are charged are true ;

you wished to contest them, to produce an argument against your accuser. All that can lead to nothing, you see. Confess: I ask you to do so for the last time."

"No!" cried Manuel, energetically.

The judge gave an order.

The inquisitor and his assistants approached the young man. Instinctively he tried to resist them.

After a brief struggle, the torturers' rough hands reduced him to impotence.

He was stretched upon the floor, while the assistants bound his feet and his hands with stout ropes.

Those ropes were then fastened to others hanging on the walls of the room, and Manuel felt himself lifted into space, while at the same time, by a horrible motion of traction his body was racked in such a manner that his limbs felt strained and his bones cracked.

Beneath the body brought into an almost horizontal position, was slipped a wooden trestle which raised the torso and increased the violence of the tension.

These preparations were those of the water torture.

"First jugful as ordinarily," said the judge's voice.

The inquisitor put an iron spatula between Manuel's set teeth, opened them forcibly and thrust the pipe of a funnel down his throat.

Slight, convulsive starts alone betrayed Manuel's intentions of resistance.

Slowly, the assistants poured into the tunnel the contents of a jug full of water.

Manuel made no sign.

Twice, thrice, they renewed the torture, but he did not seem to lose courage.

With closed eyes, he apparently awaited death.

The water torture consisted of two ordeals, the ordinary and the extraordinary.

It required more than human strength to resist the second of those ordeals.

The water, imbibed in a considerable quantity was not slow in producing the first stages of asphyxiation.

The confession then escaped the sufferer's lips—whether he was innocent or guilty.

Manuel, with his temperament of iron, with his inflexible will, resisted the first part of his torture.

His temples throbbed violently; the blood, driven suddenly to his brain, dyed his face purple, he felt a severe pain in his breast, but he still remained there with closed eyes, and, when the torturers freed his lips for an instant, when the judge said to him: "Confess," he replied in a voice still firm in spite of the torture undergone: "No!"

The torture extraordinary commenced.

Manuel opened his eyes.

At the sight of that terrible, fixed glance, the judge thought the victim on the point of supplication.

He put his question again.

"No!" replied Manuel, whose voice was becoming stifled.

"Second jugful of the extraordinary," commanded the judge.

The torturers obeyed.

That was the limit of endurance.

Manuel closed his eyes and lost consciousness.

"He has fainted!" said one of the assistants.

"Unfasten him," replied the judge. "I have never seen such obduracy."

“If he revives,” muttered one of the guards at the same time, “he must indeed have nine lives.”

Manuel, still unconscious, was borne, not to his cell, but into a room adjoining the torture-chamber, where he was given over to the care of the prison physician.

XLV.

ZILLA, a prisoner in her own room, had, you will remember, given up hope of regaining her liberty.

It was only in the morning that the old portress, attracted by more screams, went up to set her at liberty.

The gypsy immediately rushed downstairs, intending to repair to Cyrano's lodgings.

A man stopped her just as she was about to cross the threshold.

He was one of the men who had taken part in the expedition of that night.

"Zilla," asked the man, "where are you going?"

"What matters it to you?" asked the gypsy, brusquely. And she attempted to pass out.

"If you are going in search of your brother," persisted the man, "I can save you useless trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"Ben-Joël . . . is dead," replied the man, simply, for he knew nothing of the art of consideration.

"Dead!"

She stood motionless for an instant, thoughtful rather than sad.

Recent events had broken the frail tie of affection which bound her to Ben-Joël.

"How did it happen?" she asked, after a pause.

"Your brother died bravely in a combat to which he was provoked," explained the adventurer.

"You should have said in an ambush which he had

prepared himself, and of which he was the first victim perhaps. Who killed him?"

"The other."

"What other?"

"He whom they were awaiting. I do not know his name."

"And what of him?"

"He is dead as well. I was left behind, and, hidden in an angle of the house, I could witness the termination of the action. He who killed Ben-Joël was felled by a blow from a stone thrown by a personage whom we joined on rue Saint-Paul, and whom your brother seemed to obey."

"The Count!" murmured Zilla. "Ah! he has attained his object! He has killed his adversary and fate has freed him of his accomplice!"

Again, she bowed her head and seemed oblivious to her surroundings. The bandit and his companions, interested by that conversation, stared at her curiously.

"Manuel!" said Zilla to herself soon, "it is Manuel who must be thought of now."

With a commanding gesture, she waved aside the men who were around her and left the House of Cyclops.

Undecided at first as to the direction she should take, she finally determined to knock once again at the grand provost's door.

M. Jean de Lamothe, who was carefully reading the official report of the meeting during which Manuel had been tortured, and who was surprised like the judge, at the obduracy or the energy of the accused, M. Jean de Lamothe, we say, consented to receive Zilla immediately.

"Sir provost," she began, "I have come to make an appeal to your justice."

"What do you ask again?"

"I ask to be heard; I have come to proclaim Manuel's innocence."

"You have already given me a foretaste of your confessions. Notwithstanding the mistrust which your character and the rôle you have played in all this should inspire in me, the case has entered such an obscure phase, that I must neglect nothing in order to succeed in discovering the exact truth. Speak, therefore, I am listening."

"Sir provost," resumed the gypsy, "Manuel is Count Roland's brother."

M. de Lamothe fixed on her who was speaking to him a surprised and almost irritated glance.

She, disregarding the effect produced by her first words, continued her confession.

She revealed the Count's manoeuvres and disclosed to the provost some of the evil means employed to overcome her scruples.

But Jean de Lamothe rebelled against the conviction which she wished him to accept.

The confession he had expected was not the confession that fell from Zilla's lips.

He flung back his head, murmuring:

"A lie!"

She hoped to strike a final blow, when she asked:

"Would you believe me, were I to tell you that Count de Lembrat caused the assassination of M. de Cyrano last night; indeed, that he assassinated himself?"

Jean de Lamothe rose, crying:

“Wretched woman! Do you know what you are saying?”

At the same time he rang.

A bailiff appeared.

“Go to M. de Cyrano’s, and ask him to come to see me at once,” he commanded.

The bailiff withdrew, and without paying any further attention to Zilla, the grand provost resumed the examination of his papers.

A half-hour passed thus, at the end of which the provost’s messenger returned, saying:

“M. de Cyrano went out last night and has not returned to his apartments.”

Zilla then spoke to M. Jean de Lamothe again, informing him of Ben-Joël’s death.

“Even if Ben-Joël is dead, that does not prove the Count guilty,” he objected. “I will see M. de Lembrat.”

“Sir,” ventured Zilla, “will you allow me to visit Manuel? He has need more than ever of consolation and of hope.”

“To-day, I can grant you that favor. Take this.”

And Jean de Lamothe handed the delighted Zilla an order, entitling her to admission to the *châtelet*.

Manuel had barely regained consciousness, when the gypsy was ushered into his presence.

On recognizing her, he heaped no reproaches upon her.

She spent an hour at his bedside, humiliated, weeping; she talked to him a long time of Gilberte, to whom she had sacrificed her love, and on leaving him, said:

“Hope! Live! I will save you!”



Meanwhile, M. Jean de Lamothe left his study, repaired to rue Saint-Paul, and was announced to the Count, who had just returned from the de Faventines mansion.

Without any preamble, he repeated to him Zilla's words.

Without any preamble also, he said to him :

"It is you whom they accuse."

Roland smiled scornfully.

"I expect anything from those people," said he. "I must, however, call your attention, my dear provost, to the fact that an old feud existed between this Ben-Joël and Cyrano. He, probably, avenged himself, and his sister does not mind putting the responsibility on me. Besides, is the news true? Has Cyrano really been assassinated?"

"He has not returned to his inn."

"That is no reason. With the adventurous disposition which you know him to have, Cyrano may have gone away without informing any one. We will see him again in two or three days, safe and sound, I do not doubt. If he were dead, as they claim he is, they would at least have found his body."

"Indeed!" said the provost, convinced still more by Roland's calm tone and disinterested manner than by his last arguments.

"And Manuel?" the Count asked, quickly, anxious to change the subject.

"He was put to the torture this morning."

"And confessed?"

"Nothing!"

"He has some character," remarked Lembrat, tranquilly, reassured as to the result of the affair.

In spite of Roland's assurance and the great faith he had in him, the provost went away very thoughtful. His mind struggled in the midst of the diverse thoughts which encompassed it, like a fly caught in a spider's web.

As for Zilla, on issuing from the *châtelet*, she wiped her tearful eyes and repaired to Cyrano's lodgings.

She wished to obtain the book, the possession of which would be henceforth indispensable to her.

On the threshold of the inn, she met Marotte whom she had not expected to meet there, and whom she scarcely recognized, not having seen her for a long time.

After the first explanations, and on learning by what right the dancer was at the inn, Zilla told the object of her visit.

Marotte looked at her with a strange air, then, making no reply, she took her hand and drew her into the house.

XLVI.

SEVERAL days had passed, during which Count Roland succeeded in regaining his assurance.

No news had been received of Cyrano. Roland, in order to sustain his rôle to the very end, sent to Master Gonin's, and Master Gonin replied that he knew nothing.

Had Count Roland's messenger been shrewder, he would perhaps have noticed the singular tone of that reply; but he did not, and his master felt convinced that his enemy's body was buried forever in the waters of the Seine.

It was a complete triumph.

Circumstances had been very favorable to the Count. He was alone, rid of his enemy as well as his accomplices.

Rinaldo and Ben-Joël dead, no one could rise against him, except Zilla, whose testimony he no longer feared since he had burned the last proof of Manuel's innocence.

From that time, he thought only of his marriage, the celebration of which he wished to hasten, in spite of the resistance he foresaw with Gilberte.

He repaired daily to Hôtel de Faventines, and talked for a long time with the Marquis.

The latter, after each of those interviews, had a talk with his daughter, and the nearer the time fixed approached, the more did Gilberte affirm the resolution which she had frankly expressed to her father.

The Marquis, interested in the union, turned a deaf ear and continued to encourage the Count.

Finally, however, he became anxious.

Gilberte, having won her mother over to her cause, Mme. de Faventines had awakened in her husband's mind certain thoughts against which the Count had to struggle, as we shall see.

One morning, Roland arrived at the Marquis' house.

He had furnished himself with an irresistible weapon, with a plan of the contract, the clauses of which were calculated to gratify his future father-in-law's most ambitious desires.

At Roland's request, M. de Faventines examined the document.

"Your generosity is truly royal," said he, when he had finished reading it.

"Well!" the Count hastened to say, "if all seems to be properly arranged, there is nothing left to be done but to give this deed its legal form. In three days, I can become Mlle. Gilberte's husband."

"In three days!" reflected the Marquis. "Is that not hurrying matters somewhat? I do not think that my daughter would be sufficiently prepared for the marriage."

"My God," replied the Count, lightly, "all young girls are so jealous of their liberty; they like to have us long for them; a slight resistance adds a new charm to their possession; they know it very well, and are not annoyed when one says yes, for them."

"That is possible; but Gilberte's condition has caused me to reflect. She is somewhat visionary, a trifle over-excitabile; several times she has made her mother fear the effect of a fatal decision."

Roland smiled, as he said:

"That is not very flattering to my vanity. How-

ever, fear nothing. Give me Mlle. Gilberte; I will surround her with so much care, with so much respect, and with so much love, that she will speedily abandon her dismal plans and will no longer think of dying,—if ever she thought of it.”

“Gilberte is energetic and resolute.”

“Ah! dear Marquis, you are a father, and you tremble before childish mutiny! A young girl threatens to kill herself because her relatives desire to marry her suitably, it is too puerile, indeed, for one to heed it. Answer me, therefore, without scruples; I will answer for the future.”

The Marquis held out his hand to Roland.

“I have faith in you,” said he. “It shall be as you wish.”

Gilberte, informed almost immediately of the decision made by her father, was not able to utter one word in reply.

She was weary of the struggle and did not care to take the trouble to resist.

She retired to her room and called Pâquette to make the preparations for her marriage.

To be frank, Gilberte no longer regarded the life of common mortals. Her mind, stirred and overexcited by the imminence of the event, transported her into a higher sphere. She had forgotten Cyrano's consoling words and the poet's inexplicable absence did not trouble her.

Her mind was full of memories of Manuel: it was he whom she saw in the mist of her dreams; it was for him she prepared with resignation, almost with joy, to sacrifice her life.

Thus, the day set for the marriage arrived.

## XLVII.

THAT morning, Roland issued from his house, dressed for the ceremony, and repaired to the Louvre, where he was in the habit of going daily to greet the young King.

He had many friends among the courtiers, whom he had invited to his wedding.

When he had, according to custom, paid his respects, all accompanied him to Hôtel de Faventines.

It was a joyous company, chatting and laughing in the faces of the citizens assembled to see the Count and his companions, resplendent in silk, velvet and brocades, pass by, when Roland's attention was attracted by a litter whose bearers turned in the direction of the Louvre.

Behind that litter walked Zilla, Castillan and Marotte, accompanied by a third personage, very tall and attired in a short, black cassock, whom Roland did not know.

That personage was Jacques Longuépée. Roland started uneasily. But his self-possession speedily returned.

"He is dead!" he said to himself.

And, with the firm resolution to forget the *rencontre*, he reached Hôtel de Faventines.

The large drawing-room was filled with flowers and entirely hung with new and costly tapestry.

The Marquis was receiving the guests, whose numbers the spacious room could scarcely accommodate.

Shortly after Roland's arrival, the entire assemblage moved toward him.

Suddenly the footman's resonant voice announced M. Jean de Lamothe, grand provost of Paris.

"Ah! my dear friend," said the Marquis to him, "how late you are!"

"Duty before pleasure, Marquis. I had some business matters to attend to this morning."

"What! Not one day of relaxation?"

"One among others," continued the provost, "which is beginning to interest me greatly."

"What is it about?"

"The disappearance of your friend, Cyrano."

"Indeed, I invited him to my daughter's wedding, and I received the answer that they did not know what had become of him. Can an accident have happened to him?"

"I know nothing as yet. Is he dead? Or is he engaged in some mad adventure? It is a grave question. At any rate, he is or was rattle-brained, and if I am interested in him, on account of a report known to the Count, it is because he has made enough stir in the world for one to be curious as to why he no longer makes it. Seriously, I am beginning to think he has been assassinated, as they tell me."

"Poor Savinien!" sighed the Marquis, with sincere emotion.

"It would be a great pity," Roland contented himself with saying.

"Let us drop the mournful subject," said the provost.

"At what time are you to be married, my fine lover?"

"At noon!"

“In that case, we shall soon have the pleasure of greeting Mlle. Gilberte.”

“She is with her mother,” interpolated the Marquis. “You will see her in a few moments.”

In the distance, the bells of Nôtre Dame commenced to ring, announcing the hour of mass.

At that signal, the guests approached the Marquis, and, shortly afterward, a murmur was heard in the throng.

Gilberte had just appeared at the door of the *salon*, in her white wedding gown. Pâquette and the Marchioness followed her.



XLVIII.

SHE was whiter than the veil which fell over her brow.

However she smiled, a smile to order, the last concession made to her father's will.

On her virginal gown, Gilberte wore, a strange caprice which no one, however, remarked, the necklace of amber beads which Zilla had given her, and from time to time her fingers pressed the poisoned bead, by means of which she was soon about to seek safety and death.

She desired to delay the execution of her plan until the last moment; her conscience bade her live as long as chance or rather Providence might possibly interfere with her fate.

The Marquis advanced toward her and opening his arms, murmured :

“My daughter! My child!”

And that father, who, although taking an odious step in giving Gilberte's hand to Roland, shed a tear of emotion at the moment of that separation which his child's wishes were preparing to render eternal.

Gilberte looked at the Marquis sadly.

“Poor father,” she thought, “he does not know what he is doing. May God forgive him!”

The bells had stopped ringing.

“They are about to start,” said Pâquette to Gilberte in a low voice.

"Yes," whispered the maiden, trembling: "all is over."

A footman appeared in the *salon* at that moment, and, bowing before the Marquis, announced that the carriages were ready.

"Come, sirs," said the father.

He tried to take Gilberte's hand.

She reeled, and, sinking into a chair, murmured:

"Ah! I cannot!"

Pâquette, at a word from Gilberte, had left the *salon*, and returned carrying a glass of water on a silver tray.

"Compose yourself," said Roland to his *fiancée*; "compose yourself. I will await your orders."

"You will not wait long, sir."

She took the glass, put her lips to it, and holding it carefully with one hand, she dropped the poisoned bead which she had just torn from her necklace, into the water.

As Zilla had said, the bead dissolved almost immediately, without interfering with the clearness of the water.

Gilberte's lips moved slightly. No doubt she was praying.

Then, she slowly raised her glass.

As she was about to drink, having cast one last glance of regret or of hope around her, the door of the *salon* opened suddenly, and a footman broke the general silence with these words:

"Count Ludovic de Lembrat! M. Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac!"

XLIX.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gilberte, enraptured, "God has wrought a miracle; I am saved!"

And placing the glass on a console, she hastened to meet Cyrano and Manuel.

Savinien had appeared at the door of the *salon* and was advancing, supported by Manuel and Castellan. Behind, came Zilla, Marotte and Jacques Longuépée.

The poet was very pale, blood-stained bandages covered his brow, and notwithstanding the help given him, he walked with great difficulty.

Roland, overcome by the unexpected apparition, did not stir, did not utter an exclamation.

The first word was spoken by the grand provost:

"What does this mean?" he cried with a stupefaction almost naïve. "Then you are not dead, M. de Cyrano?"

"I believe not," replied the poet. "In any case, it is not Count de Lembrat's fault, if I am alive, for it is he who tried to cause my death."

"Sir, what slander!" interrupted Roland, whose boldness returned in the face of danger.

Cyrano stopped him, with an imperious gesture.

"Let me explain, sir," he continued, "you may defend yourself afterward . . . if you can."

"By virtue of what right have you come to annoy me?"

"By virtue of the right of justice. Ah! you thought me dead, and you felt yourself free! You

believed that the Seine would not give up my body! You had my people questioned, and they told you they did not know what had become of me: 'It is well,' you said to yourself in your blindness or in your folly, 'my man is no longer to be feared.' But, while you were congratulating yourself on your easy victory, my friends were watching, and their eyes, keener than those of sentinels, found me in the shallow water into which you pushed me too hastily. Thanks to this brave fellow, thanks to this courageous child," here Cyrano paused to shake hands with Castellan and Marotte, "I was taken from out the mire in which I should have died. In order to reach and to strike you at the very time of your triumph, I hid myself until now, and allowed the report of my disappearance to be believed. It is thus that not long since you tried to ruin Manuel."

Cyrano, exhausted, sat down. He had wished to tell all, and the effort had revived his pain.

"This scene is scandalous," exclaimed Roland. "Marquis, you are in your own house, put a stop to it."

"Softly, Count," then interposed Jean de Lamotte, who had listened most attentively to Savinien's words, "the friend must give place here to the judge. I must investigate all this."

"Well, provost," cried Cyrano, "those are wise words! They have reconciled me with you."

He extended his hand to his former opponent, then, pointing to Roland, he said:

"This man has abused your confidence. He caused his brother's imprisonment, in order to steal from him his fortune and his name. The Bohemian, Man-

uel, no longer exists, provost, it is Viscount Ludovic whom I present to you. It is in the name of the Queen-Regent herself that I call upon you to recognize him."

"And I," cried Roland, exasperated, "beseech you in the name of my rights to cause the arrest of these two impostors: the one, who styles himself my brother, the other, who upholds him as such."

The Marquis, having up to that time taken no interest in the discussion, ventured to say:

"But, Count, if they have proofs? . . ."

"They have none."

"I have no longer those which you stole from me," interrupted Cyrano; "I have neither your father's terrible confession, Ben-Joël's book, nor the avowal signed by your hand; but I still have your valet, Rinaldo's, deposition, written in the presence of my friend, Jacques Longuépée, here present, and fortunately taken care of by him; I have also Zilla's testimony.

"I have come from the Louvre; Queen Anne has heard my story; she shares my conviction. Through her, I have obtained Manuel's liberty, through her also you shall be punished. Read this order, provost."

"All is against me," exclaimed Roland. "I am lost!"

M. Jean de Lamothe took and read the order invested with the royal signature.

He approached Roland, who had sunk into the chair in which Gilberte had been seated a moment before, and touching his shoulder with his finger, said:

"I regret what is about to take place, Count, but,

according to the terms of this order, I am forced to arrest you. Marquis, have the doors of the house closed, and send for the police officers and the guards."

"To arrest me!" cried Roland.

"Accused of murder and of perjury," concluded the provost. "Give up your sword, M. de Lembrat."

"Ah!" exclaimed Roland, in his impotent rage.

And with his fist, he beat his brow, as if he would turn against himself the fury which stirred within him. The blood rushed to his temples, and his whole body twitched convulsively. His eyes grew dull, cold perspiration stood upon his forehead, his throat contracted. He was suffocating.

Then, mechanically, in order to escape the violent physical paroxysm, with the spontaneity of a man finding at hand the succor which can snatch him from death, he seized the glass of water left by Gilberte and emptied it at one draught.

It was done so rapidly that the girl, petrified with horror, had not even time to make a gesture to prevent the Count's action.

"Ah!" she cried, "he has poisoned himself!"

"What did you say?" asked Manuel, who was near her.

"Yes," she said, in a low and hurried tone, "I prepared the poison . . . for myself. I did not know. . . Oh! look at the Count!"

Roland stood up as erect as if moved by a powerful lever.

The glass had rolled upon the carpet. With eyes immoderately open and fixed, the Count remained standing for an instant, uttered a sort of rattling sound and collapsed.

Zilla rushed forward, and approaching Gilberte, asked:

“The bead?”

“Yes!” replied the maiden in consternation.

“My brother! My brother!” cried Manuel, who, with all the other witnesses of the scene, hastened to where Roland lay.

“Count de Lembrat no longer hears you,” said Zilla, gravely.

## L.

ROLAND was, indeed, dead; his death was caused by the poison which Gilberte had poured out for herself and which Fate had, so to speak, thrust into the Count's hand.

Cyrano looked for a long time at the corpse, the distorted face of which still breathed of anger and menace.

"There will be no blemish on the Lembrat escutcheon," he then murmured.

When Gilberte, having recovered from the effect of the terrible excitement, was again in the presence of Zilla and Manuel, she experienced a vague uneasiness.

The gypsy divined it, and taking the girl's hand, she said simply:

"Adieu!"

"Zilla!" cried Manuel, "have you nothing more to say to us? Would you leave us thus?"

She cast upon him one long glance, into which she seemed to have put her entire soul, and as a token of good-luck, as a regret as well, no doubt, there fell from her lips the highest word:

"Love ye!"

Jacques Longuépée performed the marriage ceremony for Gilberte and Manuel.

THE END.





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